

# **Empirical research on decent work and precarious work for semi-skilled and unskilled blue-collar workers: A scoping review**

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## **Abstract**

Recognising that many workers worldwide often face poverty and exploitation, the International Labour Organisation aims to promote decent and productive work opportunities for all. We conducted a scoping review to get an overall view of current academic literature on decent work and precarious work for samples of blue-collar workers. The studies included in this review, focused on empirical research conducted from 2006 onwards, that primarily investigated decent work or precarious work among semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers. The review team used a data-charting form and collected information from thirty-five articles. Most recent studies (2020–2023) were related to the experiences and livelihoods of non-traditional blue-collar workers namely platform drivers and informal waste pickers. Before 2020, the most commonly studied theme related to the experiences of migrant workers. The findings shed light on the experiences of these workers, particularly in South Africa and India and provide valuable insight into their work experiences for further discussion.

## **Keywords**

Blue-collar worker, decent work, precarious work, scoping review, unskilled, semi-skilled, essential worker

## **Introduction**

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) estimates that 3.3 billion workers are trapped in-work poverty, with poor working conditions ranked as the number one challenge in the world of work (Carr, 2023). Approximately two-thirds of these 3.3 billion workers, are employed informally, needing proper job descriptions, employment contracts, injury protection, regular hours, paid leave, social protection, and stable wages (Carr, 2023). Recognising that many workers worldwide live in cycles of poverty and exploitation, the ILO seeks to promote decent and productive work opportunities for all (ILO, 1999). The Decent Work Agenda (DWA; ILO, 1999) and Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations, 2015) aim to create a more sustainable and equitable world by promoting decent work and inclusive economic growth.

However, marginalised groups or those experiencing economic constraints, such as working-class, informal and immigrant workers, are often the implied focus of the DWA, as they are primarily employed in industries and positions that are more likely to have poor working conditions, low pay, and limited opportunities for career advancement (Blustein, 2006; Blustein, 2008). Additionally, these workers often have to take up precarious work due to a lack of choice (Blustein, 2008; Mackett, 2022).

Precarious work is often characterised by insecurity, low pay, lack of benefits, limited career advancement opportunities, and a high degree of uncertainty and instability (Allan et al., 2021; Blustein, 2006). Workers in such positions frequently face exposure to social oppression and marginalisation, economic hardship, boredom, exhaustion, and both physical and mental distress (Allan et al., 2021; Blustein, 2006). Some scholars argue that precarious work can be seen as the absence or opposite of decent work as defined by the ILO (Allan, 2023; Blustein et al., 2020).

The concept of decent work can be defined as an aspirational ideal for the type of work that should shape the lives of individuals who are currently employed or seeking employment (Blustein et al., 2016; Pereira et al., 2019). This concept recognises that work is not just a source of income, but it is also essential for maintaining personal dignity, ensuring family stability, fostering peaceful communities, and promoting sustainable economic development (ILO, 1999).

In 2016, the Psychology of Working Theory (PWT) was proposed to complement existing vocational theories in understanding peoples' career decisions and work experiences, particularly for those from poor and working-class backgrounds (Blustein, 2006; Blustein, 2008; Blustein, 2013; Duffy et al., 2016; Duffy et al., 2019). This theory aims to understand the psychological experiences of individuals in relation to their work, including lifelong experiences of social marginalisation and oppression in the workplace, and how the attainment thereof can lead to need satisfaction, work fulfilment and well-being (Blustein, 2006; Duffy et al., 2016; Duffy et al., 2019). In the PWT, decent work is defined as consisting of "(a) physically and interpersonally safe working conditions (e.g., absent of physical, mental, or emotional abuse), (b) hours that allow for free time and adequate rest, (c) organizational values that complement family and social values, (d) adequate compensation, and (e) access to adequate health care" (Duffy et al., 2017, p. 206).

Although there has been an increase in studies on decent work and the relationships outlined in the PWT (Allan et al., 2020; Blustein et al., 2020; Duffy et al., 2019), vocational scholars have identified several gaps in the research (Buyukgoze-Kavas & Autin, 2019; Di Fabio & Kenny, 2019; Ribeiro et al., 2019). Of relevance to this review is that almost all decent work studies in the social sciences have been conducted on relatively well-educated and middle-class samples (Allan et al., 2014; Blustein, 2008; Pereira et al., 2019). These samples mainly represent workers in white-collar occupations. Therefore, the experiences of the working class whom the theory intends to include, are missing from studies (Pereira et al., 2019). Additionally, most research on decent work is viewed and researched from an objective, economic or macro-level perspective (Anker et al., 2003; Ghai, 2003; Mackett, 2022), with less focus on the individual, subjective and psychological experiences of decent work. There are also concerns about the increasing levels of precarious work, which are most often studied

in isolation from decent work. Recently, researchers suggest that these concepts should be studied together (Allan et al., 2020; Blustein et al., 2020), as they are distinct but share many common elements or characteristics, even if in opposite directions, where decent work emphasises workplace protection and rights whilst precarious work highlights forms of insecurities and vulnerabilities.

In relation to the gaps identified, our research focuses on the individual experiences of semi-skilled, unskilled, and blue-collar workers. The labour market is often segmented into workers with high formal education, referred to as skilled labour, and workers with no higher education, known as unskilled labour (Falkinger, 2002). In this regard, since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, many employees in semi-skilled and unskilled occupations have been deemed “essential workers”. Essential workers are individuals employed in industries crucial to the functioning of society, such as healthcare, food and agriculture and manufacturing (McNicholas & Poydock, 2020). A blue-collar worker refers to someone and who performs manual labour, often wearing overalls or protective gear and working in settings such as factories, warehouses or outdoors (Rothmann et al., 2012; Lee & Mohamed, 2006). These jobs typically require physical strength, some practical skills (such as welding, carpentry, plumbing or electrical work) and sometimes technical knowledge (such as operating machinery). Given these skill requirements, without the need for formal higher education, these workers are also referred to as semi-skilled.

Although the term “blue-collar” may be considered generic or outdated, we use it to differentiate semi-skilled, unskilled, and essential manual work that does not require higher education, from other work. Therefore, for this study, a blue-collar worker is defined as someone who 1) engages in manual labour, 2) works outside of an office setting, and 3) does not require a higher education degree to perform their work. According to our definition, examples of blue-collar work include many government services such as water and waste management, infrastructure maintenance, energy sector work, agriculture and food production, and critical manufacturing (McNicholas & Poydock, 2020). From this list of occupations, it is easy to see that semi-skilled and unskilled blue-collar workers are vital to the functioning of the economy and society and have been estimated to constitute as much as 70% of workers globally (Blustein, 2008).

This article presents the results of a scoping review among such samples within the scope of decent work and precarious work literature. Scholars use scoping reviews to map evidence on a topic and identify main concepts, theories, sources and knowledge gaps (Tricco et al., 2018). Unlike traditional literature reviews, which may be more narrative and subjective, a scoping review follows a systematic, comprehensive and transparent methodology to minimise bias and provide an objective summary of the available evidence (Arksey & O’Malley, 2005). In line with the typical purpose of scoping reviews and the gaps identified in the literature, this review aims to locate empirical research on decent work and precarious work, specifically among samples of semi-skilled and unskilled blue-collar workers.

## **Methodology**

### **Scoping review**

The review followed the six-stage methodology outlined by Arksey and O'Malley (2005), which includes additional recommendations to clarify and enhance each stage of the framework by Levac et al. (2010). The six stages employed in the review, and outlined hereafter, are as follows: 1) identifying the research question, 2) identifying relevant studies, 3) study selection, 4) charting the data, 5) analysis and reporting and 6) consultation.

#### ***Identifying the research question***

The overall objective of this scoping review was to identify, explore and summarise empirical research conducted on decent work or precarious work for our specific study population. The review questions are:

1. What kind of evidence (empirical research) is available on decent work or precarious work, specifically on samples of semi-skilled and unskilled blue-collar workers?
2. What are the descriptive characteristics of these studies?
3. How do studies reflect the experiences and conceptualisation of decent work and precarious work?

#### ***Identifying relevant studies***

For this review, we searched for articles published from January 2006 onwards. We chose this starting date as the Psychology of Working Framework (later called the PWT) was first published in 2006 (Blustein, 2006). The first author carried out the searches in June and July 2023. As our review focuses on individual-level experiences rather than country-level indicators of decent work, we limited our research to academic literature in the social sciences.

The following search string was developed in consultation with a Scopus consultant and modified to reflect the criteria of each database:

ABS ("decent work" OR "precarious work") AND ALL (semi-skilled OR unskilled OR essential OR blue-collar) AND ALL (individual OR micro OR psychologist\* OR subjective) AND SUBJAREA (soci) AND PUBYEAR > 2005 AND LANGUAGE (English)

To be considered for the review process, 'decent work' OR 'precarious work' was required in the abstract, and at least one term from each search bracket had to be found anywhere in the article.

Gusenbauer and Haddaway (2020) recommended 14 search systems out of 28 for effectively performing Boolean searches with precision and reproducibility. Six of these databases focused on social sciences and were chosen for this review: EbscoHost, Proquest, ScienceDirect, Scopus, Web of Science, and Wiley Online Library. Given the high prevalence of informal, precarious and blue-collar workers in Africa, we wanted to include African studies

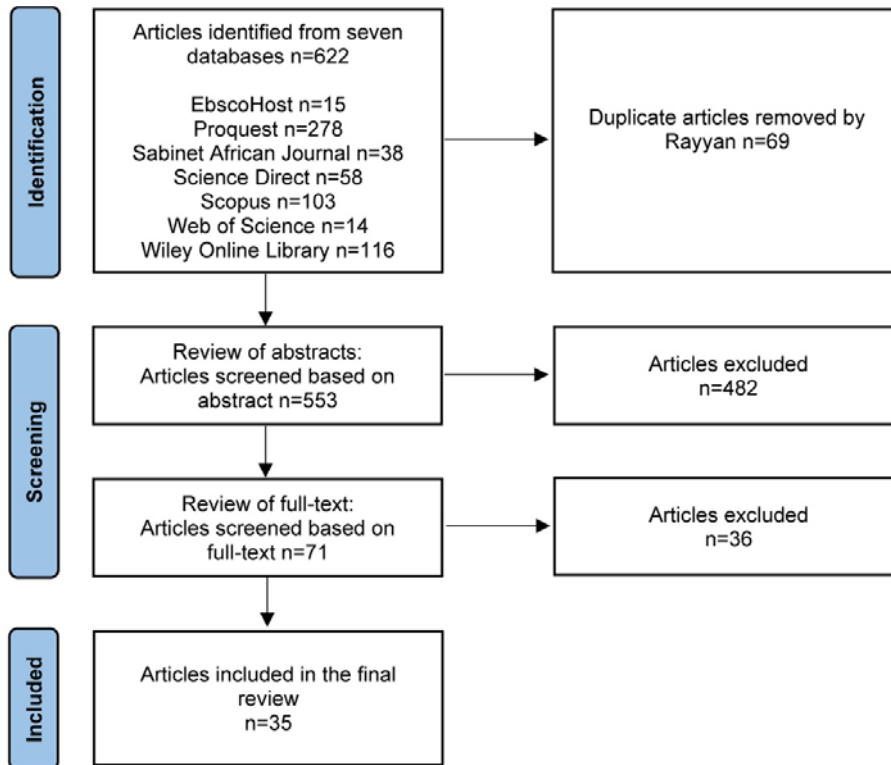
and, as such, included Sabinet African Journals. The final search results were exported into RAYYAN, a program used for organising and managing data for systematic reviews (<https://www.rayyan.ai/>). Each reviewer (authors of this paper) was given access to the RAYYAN database, which contained all the initial article abstracts retrieved from the first author's searches.

### ***Study selection***

The abstract of each article was reviewed twice, once by the first author and then by another reviewer. Each reviewer independently read their assigned abstracts and used the following four questions as a guide: 1) Does the study report empirical research? 2) Does the sample primarily consist of semi-skilled and unskilled blue-collar workers? 3) Does the study focus on decent work or precarious work? and 4) Is this from an accredited journal publication? Apart from these broad criteria, no other restrictions were applied.

Based on the independent reviews of all the abstracts by the team members, the articles were categorised 'include', 'exclude' or 'undecided'. If all the answers were 'yes', the article was labelled as 'include'. The article was labelled as 'exclude' if any question yielded a 'no' answer. The article was labelled as 'undecided' if the reviewer could not answer any question based on the abstract alone. In cases where both reviewers did not reach the same decision or where at least one author needed clarification about whether to include the article, all authors of this paper reviewed the abstract a second time. Discussions were held until a consensus was reached regarding the article's suitability for further analysis. Following the abstract review process, all the full-text articles were obtained. The first author read all of the included articles and again scrutinised the articles for their suitability for inclusion based on the selection criteria. Based on the full-texts, another 36 articles were excluded. This was further discussed until all authors agreed on the final list of articles to include in the review. In total, 176 articles were removed for not being empirical research, 153 were removed as the sample was not primarily semi-skilled or unskilled blue-collar workers and 189 were removed as the study did not focus on decent or precarious work. No studies were excluded for being published in an unaccredited journal. As this review is a summary of evidence and not a synthesis of evidence, the traditional approach was taken, whereby all studies were included irrespective of their methodological quality (Meline, 2006).

As shown in Figure 1, we initially found 622 articles from seven databases. After removing duplicates and screening the titles and abstracts, we retrieved 71 full-text articles. After reviewing the full-text and following consensus discussions between the authors, we excluded another 36 articles.



**Figure 1.** PRISMA flow diagram.

### ***Charting the data***

An Excel spreadsheet was used to record the data from each included article, with each article represented in a row and each data entry captured in a column. The following data was extracted while reading the 35 full-texts: title, author/s, publication year, journal, keywords, aim of the study, primary variables/concepts studies, whether the focus is on decent work or precarious work, country of the sample, type of manual work done by the sample, conceptualisation of decent or precarious work, and primary results relevant to the research question.

### ***Analysis and reporting***

Our analysis and reporting were guided by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-analysis revised for Scoping Reviews checklist (PRISMA-ScR; Tricco et al., 2018). The analysis is a descriptive report of quantitative and qualitative data extracted from the articles. This process maps the existing evidence and lays the groundwork for further knowledge production (Levac et al., 2010; Pollock et al., 2023; Samnani et al., 2017).

### ***Consultation***

The aim of consulting in scoping reviews is to gather input, expertise, and perspectives from different stakeholders at every research stage. This helps improve the review process's quality and relevance (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005; Levac et al., 2010; Pollock et al., 2023). This review

team was composed of four individuals: a doctoral student as the first author, two Associate Professors as co-authors from the Department of Human Resource Management, and a human resources practitioner from a manufacturing firm who was a former doctoral student in the field of decent work. All team members are researching the broader topic of decent work. Three team members were involved in developing the research protocol, four in reviewing the abstracts, and three were consulted in reviewing the full-texts. Throughout data charting, summarising, and interpreting the results, three team members (authors of this paper) regularly met and held workshops to work through data retrieved from the articles and reach a consensus on the review information.

## **Results**

According to our search criteria, articles were initially required to have ‘decent work’ or ‘precarious work’ in the abstract. Of the abstracts we reviewed, 18 contained ‘decent work’ (51%), 16 contained ‘precarious work’ (46%), and one included both terms. Therefore, most studies in our sample focused on decent or precarious work rather than a combination thereof. Additionally, research on decent work and precarious work seems equally prevalent in studies involving our sample. With regard to the specific focus of the included studies, interesting general findings emerged, confirming new trends in the workplace. Four of the most recent studies (2020–2023) were related to the experiences of platform drivers (Cieslik et al., 2022; da Silva, 2020; Giddy, 2022; Uchiyama et al., 2022). One article was on platform mediated gig work among care workers (Khan et al., 2024) and therefore a total of five articles related to platform work. These studies align with the ILO 2024 trends report, which indicates the growth of non-standard forms of work, including the gig and platform economy driven by new technologies. While these new forms of work present a range of opportunities, such as flexible work arrangements, there are several downsides, including lack of job security, low and irregular income, limited access to social protection, and work falling outside the scope and coverage of employment laws (Horne, 2024). Given the rise of platform and gig work and the risks inherent in this type of work, the observed growth in this research indicates that academic research is following the current workforce trends, which are also found among samples of semi-skilled and unskilled blue-collar workers.

Four articles discuss the work experiences and livelihoods of informal waste collectors (Chitaka et al., 2022; Lissah et al., 2020; Maciel et al., 2010; Malak et al., 2022). As global waste production continues to rise and the recycling business grows (ILO, 2023), the number of workers in this industry is expected to increase. Therefore, the growing workforce in this sector has sparked heightened academic interest in understanding and addressing the dynamics of this population.

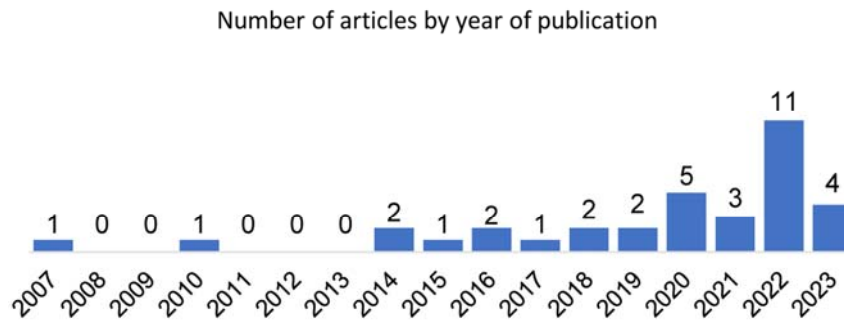
Only two studies are related to the impacts of COVID-19 (Alam et al., 2022; Austin & Donley, 2022). Given the increasing interconnectedness of global travel, urbanisation, and environmental changes that facilitate the spread of infectious diseases, it is likely that the world could face another global pandemic similar to COVID-19 in the future (World Health Organisation, 2023). Additionally, the effects of COVID-19 will likely continue to be of significant interest to researchers for many years due to its profound impact on employee relations, work environments, public health, economies, social systems, and global governance. Before 2020, the most commonly studied theme related to the experiences of

migrant workers (Axelsson et al., 2015; Preibisch & Otero, 2014; Selim, 2016; Singh, 2016) (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Titles of studies by year of publication.

2007	Micro and small enterprise labour: Job quality in the garment and material enterprises in Nairobi [1]
2010	Work health and organisation of street scavengers in Fortaleza Brazil [2]
2014	Farm size and job quality: Mixed-methods studies of hired farm work in California and Wisconsin [3]
2014	Does Citizenship Status Matter in Canadian Agriculture? Workplace Health and Safety for Migrant and Immigrant Laborers [4]
2015	On waiting, work time and imagined futures: Theorising temporal precariousness among Chinese chefs in Sweden's restaurant industry [5]
2016	Hyper individualised recruitment: Rural-urban labour and migration and precarious construction work in Bangladesh [6]
2016	Plights of migrant construction workers [7]
2017	Responses of <b>precarious workers</b> to their conditions in SA public sector [8]
2018	Voices from hidden people: <b>Precarious</b> lives and discrimination in Turkish sugar industry [9]
2018	<b>Decent work</b> : What matters most and who can make a difference? [10]
2019	<b>Decent working conditions</b> for improved construction workers' productivity on Zimbabwean building projects [11]
2019	Multipolar governance and social upgrading in the international services value chains: The case of support-service workers in Mumbai [12]
2020	Influence of work organisation and work environment on missed work, productivity and the use of pain medications among construction apprentices [13]
2020	Undervalued and overrepresented: Voices of migrant domestic workers in India [14]
2020	The <b>precariat</b> soldiering on despite challenges: A comparative study of company A in the agriculture industry and company B in the hospitality industry in Zimbabwe [15]
2020	Psychosocial risk, work-related stress and job satisfaction among domestic waste collectors in the Ho municipality of Ghana [16]
2020	Motoboys in Sao Paulo Brazil: <b>Precarious work</b> , conflicts and fatal traffic accidents by motorcycle [17]
2021	Cultural skills as drivers of decency in <b>decent work</b> : An investigation of skilled workers in the informal economy [18]
2021	Young workers without formal qualifications: Experience of work and connections to career adaptability and <b>decent work</b> [19]
2021	Organisational practices and workplace relationships in <b>precarious work</b> : New survey evidence [20]
2022	Working while feeling awful is normal: One Roma's experience of presenteeism [21]
2022	Harvest work, migration and the structured phenomenology of time [22]
2022	Assessing vulnerability of informal floating workers in Bangladesh before and during COVID-19 pandemic [23]
2022	Unpicking <b>precarity</b> : Informal work in eastern India's coal mining tracts [24]
2022	<b>Decent work</b> : Representations and prospects of work among vulnerable young Argentine workers [25]
2022	Gig workers, social protection and labour market inequality: Lessons from Malaysia [26]
2022	The <b>precariat</b> and the pandemic: Assessing the well-being of Metro Orlando's hospitality workers during the COVID-19 pandemic [27]
2022	Livelihoods of independent waste pickers at Dhaka city in Bangladesh: Does it incidental choice of them [28]
2022	Offline contexts of online jobs: Platform drivers, <b>decent work</b> and informality in Lagos Nigeria [29]
2022	Uber and employment in the global south: Not so <b>decent work</b> [30]
2022	The myth of livelihoods through urban mining: The case of e-waste pickers in Cape Town [31]
2023	Unpacking the concept of <b>decent work</b> in the psychology of working theory for blue-collar workers [32]
2023	Migrant worker well-being as a struggle for meaningful work: Evidence from Bangladeshi migrants in a developing country [33]
2023	Outcomes of <b>decent work</b> among blue-collar workers in South Africa: The role of job satisfaction [34]
2023	Caring in the gig economy: A relational perspective of <b>decent work</b> [35]

In Figure 2, we can see an increase in publications from 2020 onwards, possibly due to growing interest in the experiences of platform workers, informal waste collectors and the effects of COVID-19. These trends align with significant changes in the workforce at present (Aisenson et al., 2022; Blustein & Flores, 2023). Since the search was conducted in June 2023, six months of publications are missing from 2023.



**Figure 2.** Publications per year.

There has been a growing interest in producing more interdisciplinary research in academia, evident in the special issue call. This prompted us to consider the journals in which these studies were published. Interestingly, the articles were published in a diverse range of journals. We categorised the publications into groups based on the scope and aim of the journals. Table 2 illustrates the main areas of publication. Most of the articles (seven) were related to Geography/Geosciences, followed by five in Sociology, four in Organisational Studies, three in Employee Relations, and three in Career Development, totalling 15 articles in social science journals. The remaining articles covered various subjects such as health and safety, business and economics, agriculture, migration, public administration, transportation, and medicine.

**Table 2.** Journals categories and fields of discipline.

Journal groups	Journal name/s	Num. of articles	Total articles
Geography/Geosciences	<i>African Journals Online</i> [11]	1	7 (20%)
	<i>Geoforum</i> [5, 9,12]	3	
	<i>Indonesian Journal of Geography</i> [28]	1	
	<i>South African Journal of Science</i> [31]	1	
	<i>Tourism Geographies</i> [3]	1	
Sociology	<i>Rural Sociology</i> [4]	1	5 (14%)
	<i>Social Networks</i> [20]	1	
	<i>Sociological Inquiry</i> [27]	1	
	<i>Global Social Welfare</i> [14]	1	
	<i>Emerging Adulthood</i> [25]	1	
Organisational Studies	<i>Organization</i> [33]	1	4 (11%)
	<i>European Journal of Work &amp; Organizational Psychology</i> [18]	1	
	<i>Work, Employment and Society</i> [21, 35]	2	
Health and Safety	<i>American Journal of Industrial Medicine</i>	1	3 (9%)
	<i>Policy and Practice in Health and Safety</i> [2]	1	
	<i>International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health</i> [16]	1	
Employee Relations	<i>African Journal of Employee Relations</i> [15]	1	3 (9%)

	<i>Employee Relations: The International Journal</i> [10]	1	
	<i>Management and Labour Studies</i> [7]	1	
Business and Economics	<i>African Journal of Business and Economic Research</i> [1]	1	3 (9%)
	<i>Benchmarking: An International Journal</i> [23]	1	
	<i>Jurnal Ekonomi Malaysia</i> [26]	1	
Career Development	<i>British Journal of Guidance and Counselling</i> [19] <i>Journal of Career Assessment</i> [34] <i>Journal of Career Development</i> [32]	1 1 1	3 (9%)
	<i>Agriculture and Human Values</i> [3]	1	
Agriculture	<i>Special issue: Was as a resource</i>	1	2 (6%)
	<i>Migration, Mobility and Displacement</i> [6]	1	
Migration	<i>Journal of Ethics and Migration Studies</i> [22]	1	2 (6%)
	<i>Development and Change</i> [24]	1	
Development Studies	<i>Development Policy Review</i> [29]	1	2 (6%)
	<i>Journal of Public Administration</i> [8]	1	
Public Administration	<i>Transportation Research Interdisciplinary Perspectives</i> [17]	1	1 (3%)
Transportation	<i>American Journal of industrial Medicine</i> [13]	1	1 (3%)
Medicine			

Number in brackets indicate the specific articles

Concerning the wide range of journals in which these studies were published, it is important to note the keywords cited in these studies, as they indicate the specific focus of the research. We organised the keywords from the various articles into synonym categories. Table 3 summarises the prevalence of related keywords, providing insight into the focus of the published research. The most frequently cited keyword or phrase was related to the social aspects of work (cited 11 times). Interestingly, the social aspects of work are often overlooked in public debates, which usually focus on economic and policy issues (Blustein & Flores, 2023). This collection of keywords reflects our focus on the psychological experiences of these workers and reiterates social exclusion and marginalisation as central experiences for these workers.

**Table 3.** Keywords reflecting the focus of the research.

Keyword	Number of occurrences
social inclusion, social condition, social upgrading, social protection, vulnerability, poverty, inequality	11
health, wellbeing, sick, accident, risk, safety conditions, safety climate, stress	10
decent work	9
precarious work, precarious workers, precarious employment, precariousness	7
work conditions, working conditions, job quality	6
e-waste, waste scavenger, waste collector, waster picker, recycling, recycler	6
informal activity, informal economy, informal labour, informal jobs	5
gig work, gig economy, platform economy,	4
cultural skill, unskilled, semi-skilled, without qualifications	4
job satisfaction	3
livelihoods, living conditions	3
relationship, relational wellbeing, relationality	3
e-hailing, Uber, motoboys (motorcycle couriers)	3
career adaptability, career success	2
migrant, migration	2
workers association, collective action	2

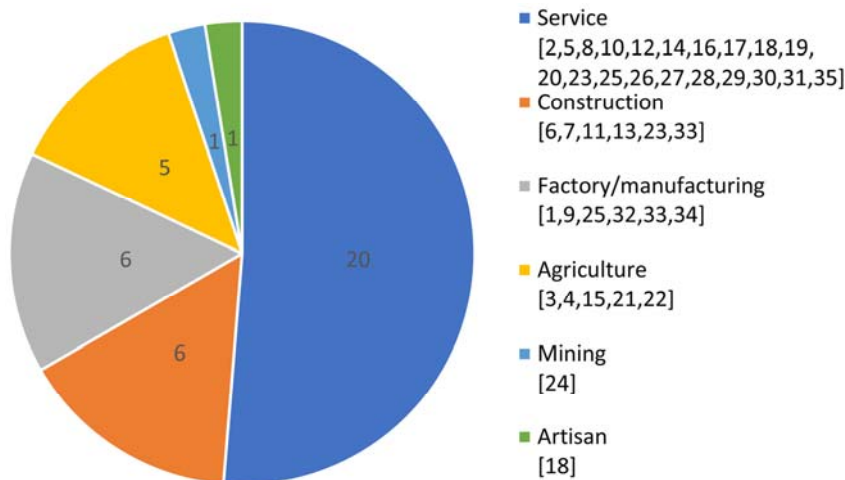
The studies emphasise the importance of health and safety in manual work, with keywords related to health and safety mentioned ten times. This highlights the significant role health and safety plays in manual work and the various challenges workers face in this study. It suggests that it may be beneficial to consider health and safety as separate but interconnected aspects for those involved in manual work. The different work environments, contexts, and arrangements lead to a wide range of health and safety facilities, policies, cultures and services. For instance, motoboy (motorcycle couriers) work in a relatively safe environment due to road regulations. However, other factors such as high unemployment rates and reliance on tips (gratuity) or customer reviews based on the speed at which they deliver a meal or a product, can increase their risk of fatal traffic accidents (da Silva, 2020). Informal waste collectors often lack access to basic amenities like toilets and clean water and scavenge off scraps, indicating poor health and hygiene conditions (Maciel et al., 2010). Similarly, factory workers are exposed to various work environments with differences in space, noise, ventilation, work materials, and exposure to harmful substances and protective equipment.

Both health and safety have physical and psychological components. For some migrants, their precarious legal status can affect their psychological well-being (Preibisch & Otero, 2014; Axelsson et al., 2015). Seasonal farmworkers often experience impacts on their mental health due to the immense pressure to meet food production and seasonal demands, which can cause them to put their family and social lives on hold (O'Reilly & Scott, 2022).

It is important to note that these keywords are related, and the phenomena they represent manifest themselves in varying intensities and patterns across types of workers, industries, forms of work, and work environments. Therefore, understanding how they intersect may be more interesting and important than understanding them in isolation.

In our study, we focused on semi-skilled and unskilled blue-collar workers and collected information about the samples and the countries where these workers were employed.

The sample of workers in the 35 articles (see Table 4) included a combination of traditional blue-collar workers and also individuals employed in new types of manual jobs, such as platform drivers and informal waste collectors. While traditional blue-collar work is typically associated with producing goods, most workers in our sample were in the service industry (see Figure 3). Within the service worker category, there were five studies on platform drivers and four on waste-pickers. The remaining service workers included those in domestic work, hospitality, retail, security, cleaning, and care work. Six studies each included samples of more traditional manual work, such as construction and factory/manufacturing work. Five studies included agricultural workers. Some studies contained mixed samples, so the total number of workers studied exceeds 35. These results are displayed in Figure 3, with article numbers.



**Figure 3.** Type of blue-collar worker.

**Table 4.** Country of research sample.

Country of sample	Type of worker	Frequency
India	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Cleaners and drivers [12]</li> <li>•Informal miners [24]</li> <li>•Rural-to-urban migrant construction workers [7]</li> <li>•Informal potters [18]</li> <li>•Migrant domestic workers [14]</li> </ul>	5
South Africa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Platform drivers [30]</li> <li>•Informal waste collectors [31]</li> <li>•Public sector cleaners and security guards [8]</li> <li>•Mining and manufacturing workers [32, 34]</li> </ul>	5
Bangladesh	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Migrant construction workers [6]</li> <li>•Independent waste-pickers [28]</li> <li>•Construction workers, housemaids and cleaners [23]</li> <li>•Manufacturing workers [33]</li> </ul>	4
United States	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Farmers [3]</li> <li>•Construction workers [13]</li> <li>•Retail workers [20]</li> <li>•Hospitality workers [27]</li> </ul>	4
Brazil	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Informal waster-pickers [2]</li> <li>•Motorcycle couriers [17]</li> </ul>	2
Zimbabwe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Constructions workers [11]</li> <li>•Agriculture and hospitality workers [15]</li> </ul>	2

Article numbers in brackets.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many organisations, including the ILO and World Health Organisation, categorised workers as essential and non-essential. According to the ILO and WHO, workers who provide essential services are in the following sectors: healthcare, law and safety enforcement, food and agriculture, transport and logistics, utilities and communication, education, public services, and sanitation and waste management.

In the articles reviewed, ten studies focused on essential workers made up of five studies examining workers in agriculture, four studying informal waste collectors, and one included security guards and healthcare workers. In 12 studies, it was impossible to determine whether the workers were essential or non-essential due to insufficient information about their roles such as what was being produced or delivered. These studies included miners, factory and

manufacturing workers and couriers/drivers. Non-essential workers were the focus of 13 studies and were engaged in construction, hospitality, retail, domestic cleaning, domestic care, and artisan work. As nearly a third of these articles include essential workers, and up to two thirds considering those with insufficient information to categorise the workers, the analysis highlights the importance of studying these samples.

We noted the countries from which the samples were taken (see Table 4). Workers from South Africa and India were each studied in five articles, followed by workers from Bangladesh and the United States, each studied in four articles, and Brazil and Zimbabwe, each appearing in two articles. The remaining samples appeared only once in 14 other countries. This analysis, presented in Table 4, indicates a significant interest in a diverse range of manual workers in terms of their migration status, the formality of their work, the sector in which they work, and the skills required for their work.

Finally in Table 5 we present the research question/s or aim of the research for each article, together with the primary variables or concepts studied, the focus of the research and results in relations to our primary research questions. This table reflects the experiences and conceptualisation of precarious work and decent work for our sample.

**Table 5.** The included studies' aim, focus and results.

<b>First author [article #]</b>	<b>Research question/s or aim of the study</b>	<b>Primary variables or concepts studied</b>	<b>Research focus</b>	<b>Results related to primary research question</b>
McCormick [1]	What is the variety of labour arrangements and working conditions present in the micro-enterprise garment and metal manufacturing sub-sectors in Nairobi?	Labour arrangements, working conditions, quality of life	Decent work	Overall micro-enterprise employment is poorly paid and insecure. Skills level vary considerably, most consider themselves casual workers, representation does not appear to be a major issue, little opportunity for career development.
Macial [2]	To understand the working conditions of associated, as opposed to unaffiliated, scavengers working in private scrapyards and to identify the impact of scavenging on their health conditions.	Work conditions, health, workers associations (identity and inclusion)	Precarious work	Average daily earnings are very low and extreme poverty is obvious. Health issues include back pain, infections and injuries. Associations can provide workers with a sense of identity and inclusion which, together with other minor improvements in work conditions and organisation, can constitute 'symbolic de-precarisation'.
Harrison [3]	To describe and explain the relationship between farm size and job quality for hired farm workers.	Farm size, job quality, wages, race, nativity, class identities, job rewards, shift flexibility	Decent work	Larger farms fared better than their smaller-scale counterparts for most job quality metrics, though many of the advantages of working on large farms accrue disproportionately to white, U.S. born workers.

Preibisch [4]	How does precarious legal status circumscribe differential inclusion in the agricultural labour market and does this affect migrant and immigrant workers' health and safety?	Employment practices, working conditions, healthcare access	Precarious work	Both groups engage in precarious work, with consequences for their health and safety, including immigrant workers with citizenship. Nevertheless, migrant guest workers are subject to more coercive forms of labor discipline and a narrower range of social protection than immigrants.
Axelsson [5]	How migrant work precarity can be usefully understood through the prism of time, both in terms of how precarious work-time arrangements are experienced and how they are produced.	Labour geography, migration, precarious employment, labour migration policy	Precarious work	Chinese chefs in Sweden's restaurant industry are not just passive victims of exploitative work-time arrangements. Rather, waiting for a return to China or settlement in Sweden may be part of migrants' strategies to achieve certain life course trajectories.
Selim [6]	What is the role of individual recruiters in determining precarious work conditions for the rural-urban migrant labourers in the construction sector of Bangladesh?	Indirect recruitment, migrant labour	Precarious work	Neoliberal practices have led to indirect recruitment practices where the pronounced existence of individual recruiters as the key actors underpins the precariousness of construction labour in Bangladesh.
Singh [7]	What are the socio-economic and working-living conditions of rural-to-urban migrant construction workers in Gandhinagar city?	Personal profile, health, wages, expenses, housing facilities, sub-contractors	Decent work	Migrant workers in the city incurred unhygienic and miserable living conditions, unsafe and ruthless working conditions They been deprived of primary resources, such as education, health, employment, social security and sustained human development. The objective of decent work for migrant workers will remain a major challenge for years to come.
Hlatshwayo [8]	To provide an overall description of precarious work in various sub-sectors of the public sector.	Perceptions of precarious workers	Precarious work	Contrary to the promises made about decent work and respect for labour standards, precarious work in the public sector has created a resilient, two-tiered labour market system. Unlike permanent workers who are employed by the state and its agencies, precarious workers

				earn low wages and have no benefits such as a medical aid or pension funds. Precarious workers tend to be women and young people. This
Nurol [9]	To reveal the connections between precarious work and discrimination patterns in the Turkish sugar industry, drawing particular attention to the increasing use of subcontracting in the public sector.	Precarious lives, precarious employment, migrant worker, discrimination, sub-contracting	Precarious work	Subcontracting in Turkey essentially meant a return to traditional cleavages between gender roles, local people and internal migrants, and permanent workers and precarious ones, even in the state-owned enterprises.
Gibb [10]	What are the hard and soft variables in low-paid service sectors (social care, hospitality and cleaning) that constitute decent work from an employers, employees, and advocates perspective?	Decent work	Decent work	Employees in low paid work prioritised hourly pay, job security, paid leave, safe working environment and supportive manager. Employers prioritised safe environment, supportive managers, supportive colleagues, purpose and meaning and socially worthwhile. Advocates prioritised fair work commissions, living wage, equality, voice and terms of employment.
Moyo [11]	What decent working conditions could improve productivity of skilled and semi-skilled workers on constructions sites in Zimbabwe?	Work conditions, labour productivity	Decent work	Adequate work-related health and safety conditions and facilities were identified through ranking as the most significant decent work conditions under which improved labour productivity can be achieved.
Kumar [12]	What are the work and employment conditions of support services workers (cleaners and drivers) catering to the ICT-ITES (Information and Communication Technology-Information Technology Enabled Services) firms?	Social upgrading, support-service workers	Decent work	Workers receive what is legally due to them but it is not enough to make a living. As neither the ICT-ITES client nor the primary service providers directly employ support service personnel, there is ambiguity in who should be regarded as the lead firm that could be held responsible for social upgrading of support service workers beyond meeting the current (not too ambitious) work standards.
Evanoff [13]	What work organisation and	Work factors, health behaviours,	Precarious work	Work organisation and environment factors influence

	work environment factors influence health behaviour and wellbeing among construction workers?	health outcomes, work outcomes		health and work outcomes. Precarious work was associated with greater use of pain medication, missed days due to work injury, and missed days from all injury or pain. Formal work breaks were associated with a decreased risk of low workability, while mandatory overtime was associated with lower health-related productivity. Mandatory overtime and low job satisfaction were associated with low health-related productivity.
Sinha [14]	What are the conditions faced by domestic workers outside of their employee-employer relationship? What are the socio-political, cultural, and economic structure that effect their wellbeing?	Household composition, quality of living, access to basic needs, water, sanitation, hygiene practices, community infrastructure, safety, working environment	Decent work	Domestic workers are devalued in society. The intersection of low caste, low socioeconomic class, being female and being a migrant makes domestic workers particularly susceptible to being treated unfairly and unable to have equal access to resources. The unequal power relations between the employer and employee makes it impossible for the workers to escape from the vicious cycle of poverty, exploitation, and social exclusion. Domestic work is often viewed as the last resort job and is synonymous with words such as unclean and untouchable
Chirasha [15]	Why do precarious workers in the Zimbabwean hospitality and agriculture sectors keep on in the face of hardship?	Precarious employment, employee health and wellbeing	Precarious work	The precariat are soldiering on because they have faith that through hard work they can be transferred to areas which are less risky in terms of working conditions. Workers cannot afford losing the precarious, straining, dangerous and dehumanising jobs simply because they are socially cut off, and they do not have any alternative source of living, hence they endure all hardships. The fear of job insecurity is exacerbated by the current economic turmoil in the Zimbabwean economy.
Lissah [16]	What are the experiences of workers in domestic waste companies in Ghana?	Health attitudes and behaviours, safety standards enforcement, work relations, work roles, social	Decent work	Domestic waste collector's poor attitudes and safety behaviours, poor enforcement of safety standards by supervisors and managers, and work-related stress caused by poor working

		protection, remuneration, community perceptions, work environment, workload, work stress, job satisfaction		environments impact negatively on domestic waste collector's health and safety. Other factors such as, poor work relations, non-clear work roles, lack of social protection, poor remuneration, negative community perceptions, and high workloads negatively impact their work stress and job satisfaction.
Da Silva [17]	What are the working conditions and risks of motorcycle couriers in Sao Paulo?	Volume of traffic, motorcycle prevalence, congestion, traffic conflict, accidents	Precarious work	Motorcycle couriers have the highest prevalence of traffic fatalities than other road users. They are both victims and perpetrators of traffic conflicts. They are subject to all kinds of prejudice and stigmas, and face discrimination by police and society.
Saxena [18]	To examine the first-person psychological experience of artisans producing traditional pottery in the informal economy.	Experiences of work, informal economy	Decent work	Contrary to previous assertions, highly skilled pottery work in the informal economy was the occupation of choice for all participants, who were found to experience strong pride, derive deep meaning, and a thriving sense of identity based on their role in society as a potter.
Vilhjalmsdottir [19]	What is the relationship between career adaptability, work satisfaction and decent work for young workers without formal qualifications in Iceland?	Career adaptability, work satisfaction, decent work	Decent work	Results support a proposition in Psychology of Working Theory that individuals with lower levels of career adaptability are less likely to engage in decent work. Work fulfils financial and social needs, but not self-determination needs.
Sheperd [20]	What are the determinants of social networks and friendships in the US retail industry?	Workplace scheduling, workplace relationships, remuneration, benefits, wellbeing	Precarious work	Retails employers who experience unpredictability in their work schedule have fewer workplace relationships than those who have predictable schedules. Individuals with a regular schedule have fewer relationship than those with schedules that vary day to day.
Collins [21]	What underpins an individual's circumstances and working conditions to produce presenteeism in seasonal agriculture work?	Migrant worker, agricultural work, precarious work, low pay, sick pay, daily survival	Precarious work	Seasonal migrant workers experience poor health, low pay, in-work-poverty, no access to sick benefits, and work in a highly insecure agriculture sector. The impact of precariousness spills over into family life manifesting as poor physical and mental health for the whole family and

				problems arising out of uncertainty about the future and the effects on children education.
O’Rielly [22]	What are the lived experiences of temporary farm workers in the UK and how is it that short-term precarious work remains the accepted solution for agricultural work?	Seasonal migrant labour, time	Precarious work	Farmers are under immense pressure to respond to just-in-time food production demands and to nature’s seasonal demands. Migrant workers provide a solution by being, temporary, flexible, and responsive on a daily basis. Locally based workers are rarely in a position to suspend their daily lives to commit to the farm, even for a short period. They are not enabled to be flexible in terms of their daily time: they have families, social lives, health needs, travel costs, and housing costs to consider.
Alam [23]	What does Covid-19 add to the vulnerability of informal floating workers (daily wage earners) in construction and cleaning working in Bangladesh?	Job security, wages, working environment, psychological wellbeing, education	Precarious work	The study has found that the pandemic has multiplied the existing vulnerability of the floating workers on many fronts that include job losses, food crisis, shelter insecurity, education, social, physical and mental wellbeing.
Noy [24]	To explore two widespread types of informal and precarious work in eastern India’s coal mining tracts to disaggregate the umbrella notion of precarity.	Work characteristics, earnings, gender dynamics	Precarious work	Labourers evaluate different forms of informal and precarious work in relation to one another in terms of relative stability, autonomy, tempo, and gender dynamics, which affect their livelihood decisions and activities. Coal peddling, seemingly the exemplar of informality and precarity, is perceived by villagers to be not only a relatively dependable and profitable means of income but also an enabler of autonomy.
Aisenson [25]	What is the meaning of work in general, actual work experiences (in diverse sectors including manufacturing, cleaning, construction) and expectations for the future of young urban unskilled workers with no	Unemployment crisis, choice, age-related imperative to work, representation of decent work, future work prospects	Decent work Precarious work	There is acceptance and resignation of highly precarious working conditions due to the unstable general context and the lack of quality employment. There is a distinction between work and personal interests, and future prospects are presented as a “crossroads” between your expectations and the options available. All this affects the meanings of work, the future,

	high school diploma in Argentina?			and therefore affects their well-being and identity construction.
Uchiyama [26]	What do e-hailers and food delivery drivers think about their work and future work? What does this tell us about social protection for gig workers?	Employment status, gig worker behaviour, social protection, interaction with customers, gig workers prospects	Decent work	They see themselves as independent contractors, e-hailing as a simple way to earn an income, with low barriers to entry, flexibility, and performance-based payment. E-hailing is not seen as a long-term means of work as full-time jobs are preferable. Drivers face low collective bargaining power, asymmetry in rating system, information asymmetries, emotional labour, inability to get loans without employment contract and pay their own insurances. Mixed views on whether it is a decent work or not. Need for government policies to protect gig workers.
Austin [27]	What are the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic upon hospitality workers in the metro Orlando?	Employment status, financial stability, mental health, housing, food security, income, household expenses, Covid-19	Precarious work	All workers had significant drop in income, most notably tipped workers. They were less able to pay expenses such as food. They experienced negative effects on mental health (increased fear, anxiety, depression, loneliness) The inconsistent scheduling which characterizes this line of work, further contributes to the increased precarisation of women as compared to men.
Malak [28]	What are the living conditions of independent waste pickers, particularly their assets to sustain their livelihoods?	Livelihood asset profile, vulnerability, climatic and anthropogenic factors	Decent work	The asset profile of waste pickers is very low. Waste-picking is the product of lacking other options. Most were homeless, with very limited access to electricity, water and sanitation. Their efforts are largely unrecognised/unrewarded, and their labour is stigmatised. They have far less access to health, education, credit and utilities.
Cieslik [29]	Can e-hailing create decent work in sub-Saharan Africa? Comparing gig work to the informal economy.	Informal economy, platform work, e-hailing	Decent work	E-hailing platforms may offer certain gains compared to regular taxiing in the informal sector, but these are context and platform specific. Examples include access to insurance, credit, and cash transfers. Gig work remains embedded in the informal economy as it is unregulated and does not abide by labour

				standards nor offer social protections.
Giddy [30]	What are the experiences of Uber drivers in South Africa and is this decent work according to the ILO four pillars?	Drivers' experiences, income, hours worked, other employment, safety concerns	Decent work	Uber drivers face many challenges such as long working hours, low fares, subcontracting of drivers and concerns over driver safety. These results show that working for Uber, should not be considered decent work.
Chitaka [31]	What is the extent of participation of e-waste pickers in the value chain, their remuneration and to what extent does the practice contribute to sustainable livelihoods?	Activities of waste pickers, income, cooperation among workers, health and safety, subjective wellbeing	Decent work	Waste-pickers participate in multiple activities, including collection, dismantling, processing and refurbishment in order to obtain a higher income. Working with e-waste is associated with many health and safety risks. The mean weekly income from e-waste activities was ZAR537 (USD37). The likelihood of surviving on e-waste activities alone is low. Of those participating in e-waste picking alone, 22.9% were below the food poverty line. Workers may be considered to be trapped in their situation.
Kekana [32]	What do unskilled and semi-skilled workers in a manufacturing company in South Africa consider to be decent work?	Decent work, meaning of work	Decent work	Workers reported both objective (e.g., job characteristics and resources, working conditions and skills reproduction) and subjective dimensions (e.g., challenge and mastery and fairness) dimensions of decent work.
Sambajee [33]	What is the wellbeing at personal, relational, organisation and communal sites of South-South migrants engaged in manufacturing and construction work?	Dignity, relational wellbeing, subjective wellbeing, migrant, meaningful work	Precarious work	Findings showed positive objective signs of well-being derived from company resources and host country integration (e.g., access to healthcare). Organizational control permeated work and life, repressing autonomy and voice, and poor health and isolation were evident. Despite these challenging conditions, subjective signs of well-being indicated autonomous actions and informal collectives which enhanced personal efficacy, voice, relationships and belonging. For all participants, self or collectively organised activities were guided by, and generated, self-reliance, self-efficacy, pride, moral standards, reciprocity, solidarity

				and social capital bonds with other migrants.
Koekemoer [34]	What is the relationship between decent work, subjective career success and turnover intention among South African blue-collar workers in a manufacturing firm?	Decent work, job satisfaction, subjective career success, turnover intentions	Decent work	Blue-collar workers who experience decent work are more likely to experience job satisfaction and subjective career success. The indirect effect of job satisfaction between decent work and turnover intention was confirmed among the sample.
Khan [35]	What are the lived experiences, specifically around relationality, of care workers using digital platforms in Australia?	Interactions between workers, platforms, and clients	Decent work	The study highlights the importance of social interactions and relationships to elucidate how relational aspects shape workers' experiences. Platform workers consider mutuality of interests, responsiveness and reciprocity, attentiveness, and solidarity to maintain a balance of care (care-for-self and care-for-others) when negotiating platform-mediated care work. This article contributes relationality as a key dimension of decent work currently overlooked in studies exploring gig work arrangements.

Full reference list of articles included in this review, is available upon request from the first author.

First, it is interesting to note that although 'decent work' and 'precarious work' were equally represented in the abstract (18 time and 16 times respectively), most studies elucidated unfavourable working conditions. This suggests that for our sample of semi-skilled and unskilled blue-collar workers, most workers experience challenging and less-than-ideal working conditions.

The studies explore various types of work and the experiences of workers across different sectors. Many workers in sectors like agriculture, construction, manufacturing, and service industries (e.g., waste collectors, domestic workers, drivers) face precarious working conditions. They often experience job insecurity, low wages, poor working environments, and lack of access to social protections or benefits. Examples include construction workers in Bangladesh (Selim, article 6), migrant agricultural workers, (Preibisch, article 4) and gig economy drivers (Uchiyama, article 26).

Several studies highlighted the adverse effects of work on health and wellbeing. Workers like waste collectors (Macial, article 2; Lissah, article 16) and motorcycle couriers (Da Silva, article 17) face health issues such as back pain, injuries, and higher risks of accidents. Work also leads to increased use of pain medication and poor mental health among construction workers (Evanoff, article 13). Workers in Zimbabwean construction sites (Moyo, article 11) identified work-related safety conditions as crucial for productivity.

Migrant and minority workers often face additional challenges, including discrimination and unequal access to resources. Domestic workers in India (Sinha, article 14) and migrant agricultural workers (Preibisch, article 4) are subject to social exclusion, while waste collectors and informal workers endure stigma (Malek, article 28).

Young workers in Iceland (Vilhjalmsdottir, article 19) with low levels career adaptability are less likely to engage in decent work. In Argentina, there is a sense of resignation about future career prospects, and for some youth, work primarily serves as a means of survival rather than a source of personal or professional fulfilment (Aisenson, article 25). This is also experienced by agriculture and hospitality workers in Zimbabwe who endure precarious, dangerous, and dehumanising jobs because they have no alternative sources of living (Chirasha, article 15).

Harrison (article 3), Pribisch (article 4) and Sinha (article 14), among others, indicate how race, legal status, socio-economic background, migration and social exclusion intersect to create unique challenges for workers, amplifying their vulnerability, limiting access to resources and deepening their experiences of exploitation and precarity.

Selim (article 6), Hlatshwayo (article 8) and Nurool (article 9) indicate how indirect recruitment practices, whether through individual recruiters or subcontracting, contribute significantly to the precarity of workers by distancing them from the main employer, reducing accountability, and limiting access to benefits and protections.

Several studies examine the experiences of gig work (for example Uchiyama, article 26; Cieslik, article 29; Khan, article 35). In this sense, many indicated that they see gig work as a temporary solution rather than a sustainable long-term job (Uchiyama, article 26). Uber drivers in South Africa (Giddy, article 30) report long hours, low wages, and safety concerns, highlighting the challenges of categorising gig work as decent employment. However, e-hailing in Sub-Saharan Africa offer gains in income compared to regular taxing in the informal sector (Cieslik, article 29).

Interestingly, despite precarious conditions, some workers find ways to derive meaning, cope with challenges and build resilience in precarious situations. For instance, Chinese chefs in Sweden (Axelsson, article 5) view their precarious work as part of long-term migration strategies, either waiting to return home or settle in the host country. Artisans in the informal economy (Saxena, article 18) experience pride, strong meaning, and identity from their skilled pottery work, despite being in informal employment. Worker associations provide a sense of identity and inclusion for some workers, such as waste collectors (Macial, article 2), helping them to symbolically de-precaritise their work. Some migrant workers in manufacturing (Sambajee, article 33) build informal support networks that foster self-reliance, solidarity, and a sense of belonging.

Some studies focus on the constituents of decent work which include fair wages, safe working environment and supportive managers (Gibb, article 10). Kekana (article 32) reports that job characteristics, resources, working conditions and skills reproduction are core dimensions of decent work. Care workers utilising digital platforms value relationality as a key dimension of decent work (Khan, 35). Similarly, Sheperd (article 20) indicates how forming strong work relationships in the retail industry is linked to predictability and variety in the work scheduling.

Not surprisingly, blue-collar workers in South Africa (Koekemoer, article 34) linked decent work with job satisfaction and subjective career success.

## **Discussion**

This review lays the foundation for comprehending the existing knowledge about the work experiences of a specific group, namely semi-skilled and unskilled blue-collar workers. Table 5 provides insights into how decent work and precarious work are conceptualised and studied in various contexts. Decent work is often examined through the lens of how improvements in work conditions can lead to better productivity, career growth and worker wellbeing. The studies on decent work tend to focus on what factors are missing or need improvement for work to be considered 'decent' (for example Gibb, article 10; Kumar, article 12; and Moyo, article 11). On the other hand, precarious work is studied in terms of its negative effects on workers' health, economic stability, and overall wellbeing. Studies conceptualise precarious work as being exploitative, insecure, and harmful, as evidenced by the adverse outcomes of workers in sectors like agriculture, construction, and service (for example, Harrison, article 3; Macial, article 2; Preibisch, article 4; and da Silva, article 17). The review indicates how both decent and precarious work concepts intersect with wider socio-economic factors such as migration, gender, race, and policy environments, which shape workers' experiences differently across various industries and regions.

In addition, the findings of the scoping review reveal scholarly interest in studying non-standard forms of work, such as platform work and waste-collecting. Whilst these jobs offer flexibility they come with significant challenges, exacerbated by their independent contractor status which currently fall outside the scope of existing employment laws. This research highlights the social aspects of work, which despite frequently studied, are often overlooked in favour of economic and policy discussions. Social exclusion and marginalisation are central to the experiences of many workers and could play a more central role in labour research and policy. Not surprisingly health and safety are central to manual work and require ongoing attention and improvement.

Throughout the review process the authors reflected on the keywords 'unskilled' and 'semi-skilled' used to describe the sample. Given that one- to two-thirds of the sample are engaged in essential services, the terms 'unskilled' and 'semi-skilled' appear paradoxical. Historically 'unskilled' and 'semi-skilled' have referred to markers of education when categorising work, however, the terms fail to capture the complexity and value of different jobs. Instead, more inclusive terminology that recognises the diverse skills and expertise required in various roles should be used to better differentiate types of work. This shift can promote greater respect and understanding for all forms of labour. One approach to achieve this may be to align our research with the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO) created by the ILO. The purpose of the ISCO is to categorise jobs into clearly defined groups based on the tasks and responsibilities involved. Jobs are categorised based on the skills and specialisation required to carry out the work (ILO, 2012).

Relatedly, future research could gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of workers in essential and non-essential roles. While the ILO and WHO have identified categories of essential workers, social science researchers have yet to intentionally study these groups. We

think there is a responsibility on the part of industrial/organisational psychology and related fields to create a knowledge base that can inform programs and policies aimed at promoting decent and productive work for essential workers.

Finally, given the challenging context in which many people work, and the existence of decent and precarious aspects of work in most jobs, industrial psychologists and career development practitioners could consider their role in preparing people for less-than-ideal experiences at work. This may provide a new avenue of research that integrates tenants of positive psychology with decent and precarious work literature.

In essence, we conclude that decent work and precarious work are inextricably linked for semi-skilled and unskilled blue-collar workers. Much research lies ahead to better integrate these constructs and to appreciate the value of work produced by this sample.

### ***Limitations and recommendations***

The main limitations of our study are related to our review protocol. Various methods can be used to identify relevant studies for a review, each with different benefits and applications (Harari et al., 2020). While database searches are typically the most used method to identify studies, it is recommended to use a variety of complimentary methods. Our search did not include complimentary searches such as hand searching, and we did not extend the scope to include grey literature. As the review methodology was primarily guided by Arksey and O'Malley (2005) and Levac et al. (2010) we did not capture the data in such a way that allows us to fully adhere to the PRISMA-ScR guidelines (Tricco et al., 2018) in our reporting.

We initially focused our search on decent work and precarious work. However, we realised that including related keywords like unemployment and underemployment could have significantly expanded our research findings. We decided not to include these keywords in our review, as unemployment and underemployment are generally linked to structural and environmental factors.

In planning the review, our theoretical conceptualisation of the type of worker was that of people carrying out essential manual work in industries or roles that are crucial to the functioning of society. However, we did not include this detail in our operationalisation of a blue-collar worker. Therefore, we have a large range in the type of worker and the importance of the work carried out by the sample in the 35 included. A more focused sample could have provided more nuanced understanding of essential manual work.

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