

# TACKLING PRECARIOUS WORK

Toward Sustainable Livelihoods

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# 1

## FROM PRECARIOUS WORK TO SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS

### Introduction to the Volume

*Stuart C. Carr, Darrin J. Hodgetts, Veronica Hopner,  
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#### **A Great Unfreezing**

The 2020s are not just a new decade; they mark a new chapter in the world of work. The United Nations (UN) agency mandated to assess the state of the world of work is the International Labour Organization (ILO). According to ILO Director-General Guy Ryder, “As the COVID-19 pandemic enters its third calendar year, the global employment and social outlook remains uncertain and fragile” (ILO, 2022a, p. 3). In a word, the entire world of work is today *precarious* and poses a serious threat to human security that has been a long time in the making and which has been exacerbated by the present pandemic (Hodgetts, Hopner et al., 2022). According to the ILO (2012, p. 28), in everyday working life, this precariousness often means: (1) being poorly paid and unable to fully support a household; plus (2) facing work insecurity; (3) having little, or zero, social protection: all of which result in being subject to increased material and psychological stress and strain. This new Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology (SIOP) volume broaches discussion of these combined threats to humanity and thus a frontier to be addressed, in research and practice, with a concerted, integrated, humanitarian response (Hakel, 2013). The responses that comprise this volume are anchored in, but not simply confined to, one particular discipline and profession: Industrial and Organizational (I/O) psychology. Collectively, they tackle the human insecurities that stem from precarious work, thereby advancing humanitarian work psychology closer toward supporting sustainable livelihoods.

The purpose of the book series is to push the frontiers of research in I/O psychology. Therefore, the foci of all volumes point to new areas and avenues of

research. The series' core focus is not on policy or actions to address issues such as precarious work. However, I/O psychology—like other areas of engaged or applied scholarship—has always been about praxis and employing research to inform efforts toward positive real-world impacts. As such, this volume moves beyond documenting precarity and hardship to consider research evidence regarding how we might respond in ways that help workers. Our relational ethics do not allow us to extract knowledge from workers through research and not reciprocate by working on solutions to the problems they face (Hodgetts et al., 2022; Hopner & Liu, 2021). Hence, each chapter in the volume reviews the substantive research on their respective topics: some reflecting on their own seminal work and many discussing applications of research including future directions.

The breadth of this frontier is immense, and some statistics may help illuminate the scale of precarious work today. The last time the world of work was anywhere near stable enough to reliably freeze-frame with global statistics was 2019. After decades of labor markets racing to the bottom on wages and other work conditions, almost two-thirds of the world's 3.3 billion people in the workforce were working informally, mainly self-employed and on their own means (ILO, 2019). The majority of the remaining one-third who actually had a formal job were struggling to make ends meet (International Trade Union Confederation [ITUC], 2018). Sounding global alarm bells, the ILO (2019) singled out “poor work conditions” as the “main global employment challenge” for the world of work. Chiming with that tocsin, the UN's World Bank Group (2019) warned the world was entering a time to “protect people, not jobs”—implying that job precariousness was actually the nub of the challenge. Underscoring that point regarding the precarity of work, the year of 2020 opened with another UN agency announcing a pandemic (World Health Organization, 2020). Throughout 2020 and 2021, the COVID-19 pandemic was a great disruptor. In 2022, a third seismic event—the Russian Federation's invasion of Ukraine—created a perfect storm involving precariousness, a pandemic, and shattered peace. In the face of this conflagration, the global labor market went into “reverse gear” in 2022, regressing from a tentative recovery during 2021 in some countries and economic and societal disasters in others to levels back at the 2019 baseline nadir for jobs, wages, and work precarity (United Nations, 2022).

Precarity notwithstanding, disruptors can bring opportunities as well as threats. *Tackling* precarious work and promoting increased equity is one such opportunity. Revisiting Kurt Lewin (1947), today we are living in a great *un-freezing* moment (Burnes, 2020). Core everyday assumptions about “where” we work, “how” we work, and even “who” pays our wages (employer, government, or people who pay us for our goods and services) have been challenged and, for many people, re-imagined. For example, we have seen mass furloughs with government wage subsidies for public and private sectors and the movement of many workers from traditional office work-places to increased reliance where possible on “place-less” digital platforms and automated artificial intelligence

(AI) systems—and in some cases back to the office again. We have also heard serious policy proposals for a universal basic income (UBI) that would help protect society’s most vulnerable in the wake of devastating job losses (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2020). For most of us, ideas such as UBI would have been radically unthinkable prior to the 2020s. Today these are ethical, normative challenges to rethink the world of work—and with it, the ways we practice, theorize, and teach I/O psychology.

In the spirit of making the unthinkable thinkable, the idea for this volume came from SIOP. In 2020, the team of editors and editorial Board of SIOP’s Organizational Frontiers series identified precarious work as a timely topic for this prestigious series. This book stands on the shoulders of previous contributions in the humanitarian space (e.g., McWha-Herman et al., 2016; Olsson-Buchanan et al., 2014; Reichman, 2014; Rupp & Mallory, 2015). It was envisioned by the editorial team and the SIOP Board that a new volume should examine specifically the nature and effects of precarious—poorly paid, insecure, and unprotected—work on individuals, organizations, and communities. This demarcates the domain of the current volume from more established fields in IO, such as business enterprise training and development (see Frese et al., 2016; Satzman et al., Chapter 2), enterprise selection (Klinger et al., 2013), and newer fields (for I/O psychology) such as social enterprise development (Nguyen et al., 2021). In each of these fields, I/O psychology has contributed to and is contributing toward tackling poverty (Carr, 2013). This volume continues and builds on that tradition. Crucially, the remit for this particular volume was not solely to document work-related misery and hardship. More importantly, it was to shift discussion toward tackling and reforming precarious work.

Toward what end? An impending challenge for I/O psychology as for work—by definition their shared frontier—is how to move the needle from unstable, low-paid work to work that is more decent, protective, and, in a word, *sustainable* for people, organizations, and the communities that support them (Bal et al., 2019). With the promotion of—and transformation to—more sustainable livelihoods in mind, this volume brings together a range of pioneers in their related specializations. It contextualizes their contributions, setting the scene for the volume as a whole in relation to the changing world of work and the ILO goal of “decent work and economic growth” for all. This goal is officially designated as SDG-8 of the 17 2016–2030 UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). UN SDG-8 is operationalized across the volume and links this volume to the rest of the Organizational Frontiers series with its ethos of ethical practicality, and humanity.

This volume further anchors often-abstracted, global ideas like “universal decent work” within local situations, everyday work practices, and lived experiences. Relatedly, a historical strength of I/O psychology has been its focus on the diversity of sociocultural values and norms in the workplace, including at

national, organizational, and individual levels (for a review, see Carr, 2013). This chapter builds on, but also constructively away from, those foundations. Specifically, this chapter—like the contributions that follow—adds to these sociocultural considerations. We do so by including diversities associated with the various socioeconomic situations of different groups that are omnipresent at the hard edges of the wage, work security, and wellbeing spectra (Carr, 2023). Finally, this chapter and book take a deep dive into “who” has been systematically excluded from decent work in the past, and how they might be systemically *included* in our collective and sustainable futures.

## Volume Structure

Based on advice from the SIOP board and series editors, and resonant with the facets of decent work identified by the ILO (2012), this volume explores four interrelated dimensions of a precarious work-scape. The first and foundational is Sustainable Livelihoods. The adjective “sustainable” links the volume conceptually to the future and thereby to new frontiers. Sustainability is also the core focus in global policy for world development, for example, at the UN and the ILO. The second term, “livelihoods,” radically expands the older idea on which work policies and IO alike have placed much stock-in-trade faith: “the job.” An inconvenient truth is that “the job” has not reduced but instead exacerbated poverty and inequality for many people in the world (World Bank Group, 2019). Clearly, the world, and IO with it, needs a much more expansive, inclusive, and durable concept than “finding a job” to alleviate poverty. This is because increasing numbers of jobs are poor quality and do not pay a liveable wage sufficient to lift people out of poverty. Sustaining a livelihood through decent work is thus a more substantive, salient, and aspirational goal in life for large swaths of the human population globally.

The remaining three sections of the volume—Fair Income, Security, and Social Protection—are named after specific elements in the ILO’s (2012) definition of decent work, which the ILO proposed precisely to tackle precarious work. In policy terms, they represent the antithesis of work precariousness—which includes (1) poor pay, (2) lack of work-related security, and (3) poor social protection. According to the ILO (2022b, p. 1, emphases added):

Decent work sums up the aspirations of people in their working lives. It involves opportunities for work that is productive and delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for families, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives and equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men.

A key challenge (and opportunity) for I/O psychology, operating as it does mainly at micro/group levels, is finding ways to translate these often-abstracted ideas of fair income and work security into lived work experiences. As an organization with accredited special consultative status at the UN and joined by other associations like the International Association for Applied Psychology (see Saltzman, Reichman & O'Neill Berry, Chapter 2), SIOP has recognized this need to expand our subdisciplinary horizons to include everyday lived experiences of human development goals for over a decade (Scott, 2011; see also, Bal et al., 2019). This volume takes another step forward in that professionally responsive direction.

### **Sustainable Livelihoods**

For much of its first 100 years, I/O psychology has been critiqued for following and contributing to the primacy of managerial and economic perspectives on work, rather than those of workers, their families, and communities. In other words, I/O has tended to serve power rather than empowerment (Baritz, 1960; Brief, 2000; Carr, 2007) and “efficiency” rather than humanity (Lefkowitz, 2017) and the broader human relations that are impacted by work. In recent decades, a figure-ground reversal has been building between efficiency and humanity. In a case in point, humanitarian work psychologists have made the case that we need to pay more attention not only to work that focuses on humanitarian issues (for example, in aid agencies and food banks) but also to making work conditions more humanitarian (Carr et al., 2012; McWha-Hermann et al., 2016; Olson-Buchanan et al., 2014; Reichman, 2014).

In the 2nd century of I/O, calls to tackle poor working conditions to protect people from precarious jobs and their personal and relational impacts foreground how much further we need to go in the human security and wellbeing direction. One way for us to advance that frontier would entail defining, articulating, and embracing a new, more expansive—and inclusive—superordinate goal for I/O psychology. We as co-editors contend that this goal should include sustainability. Sustainability science “tackles effects of globalization on the [world’s] fragile ecosystems and economies” (Kates et al., 2001, p. 642). Embracing that ethos, the aptest focus for I/O psychology— transcending precarious jobs and work in general—becomes sustainable livelihoods that foster human security (see later section).

Arguably, the concept of a sustainable livelihood is an ancient one, having been around for as long as people have had to sustain themselves as a species on this planet. In the late 1980s, the modern English term *sustainable livelihood* was coined. It appeared in a report on environmental sustainability in economically poor rural communities located in the so-called developing world

(World Commission on Environment and Development, 1989). Subsequently, the term was defined in a manner that resonates with the concept of decent work:

[A] livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets... and activities required for a means of living, a livelihood is sustainable which can cope with and recover from stress and shocks, maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets, and provide sustainable livelihood opportunities for the next generation; and which contributes net benefits to other livelihoods at the local and global levels and in the short and long term.

*(Chambers & Conway, 1991, p. 6)*

During the 1990s, the ambit for sustainable livelihoods widened, by extending from a focus on rural work to include considerations pertaining to urban environments where most of the world's population now lives and works. In the 2000s, it was expanded yet again with a focus on how to buffer work from the impacts of natural and humanmade disasters. In the 2010s, the importance of sustainable livelihoods featured at the landmark 2012 United Nations Conference in Rio de Janeiro, wherein it was now linked to the broader issue of sustainable development. Among the first outcomes to be defined as deliverables from a sustainable livelihood perspective were: (1) generating a decent amount of income and (2) protecting people's everyday wellbeing (Department For International Development, 1999). Anchorage points like these connect the concept to humanitarian concerns in IO, including humanitarian work psychology and the emphasis placed on promoting the wellbeing of workers and those around them through decent work practices. Policywise too, the 2012 Rio Conference Declaration highlighted the need for a concerted plan, more comprehensive and coordinated than any predecessor, for all countries to break free of poverty by grappling with the complexities of the world of work and the need for decent employment. It is also crucial that IO responds to broader plans for economic, material, social, and psychological inclusion through work and communal life.

Out of Rio emerged the current, most widely consulted, grand plan for human development: the 2016–2030 SDGs. Unlike their predecessors the 2000–2015 Millennium Development Goals, which focused on aid to lower income countries, these SDGs have a much wider and more inclusive ethos. Their primary goal (SDG-1) is eradicating poverty “in all its forms, everywhere.” Supporting this primary goal are 16 other goals. In these, we see an integrated framework that overtly signals links between decent work (SDG-8) and opportunities for people to develop and realize their potentials in life. These links include access to decent nutrition (SDG-2), healthcare (SDG-3), and education (SDG-4); equal opportunities for women (SDG-5); and access to clean water and energy (SDGs 6 and 7). Decent work in turn also supports the other SDGS from nutrition and health to sustainable industrialization (SDG-9); income equality (SDG-10); safe

cities and decent housing (SDG-11); sustainable consumption (SDG-12); climate action (SDG-13) on water (SDG-14) and on land (SDG-15); and by promoting human security (SDG-16). All 16 of these are implemented through one final process goal, partnerships for development (SDG-17).

The concept of decent work and the related conceptualization of SDG-8 invoke a win-win situation in terms of combining decent work conditions *and* economic development (see above) which will be familiar to I/O psychologists. What is probably newer, and more resonant with HWP, is the concept of sustainable livelihood. In the past, we have placed much of our trust in making work decent in one institution at a time: “the job,” an institution within the formal economy. Job analyses, job descriptions, job evaluations, job selections, job placements, job design, job performance, job training, and job wellbeing have been IO stocks-in-trade. Yet today, as we have seen, a full two-thirds of the world’s 3.3 billion workforce *do not have a formal job at all*, while the remaining one-third that do have one are mostly *struggling to make ends meet*. Hence, now is the time not to ditch jobs completely (if you have one, and it is sustainable, good luck to you!) but rather expand our conceptual horizon of what decent work can and must deliver for people, regardless of sector.

Sustainable livelihoods provide us with a conceptual foundation for the rest of the volume, including its foci on tackling (1) poor pay, (2) lack of work-related security, and (3) poor social protection. Such considerations must include the over 2 billion people who work in the informal sector and who may not want to join the formal economy or pay taxes to regimes that they may experience as oppressive, for example. Instantiating and incorporating life-worlds of work, chapters in the foundational section, Sustainable Livelihoods, span a range of ways that IO can readily rethink the world of work and respectfully engage in partnerships with diverse stakeholders (under SDG-17) to tackle the problem of precarious work. These ways are fundamentally future-oriented, interconnected, intergenerational, and human-relational.

Chapter 2 (by Saltzman et al.) documents the extent and nature of precarious work. The authors identify the psychological foundations of decent work and extract key lessons learned when advocating for it at the UN. Chapter 3 (Di Fabio, Medvide, & Kenny) reviews and advances the leading vocational theory on the psychology of working, incorporating elements from the Decent Work Agenda and linking these to the psychology of sustainable livelihoods. Subsequently, Chapters 4 (Searle & McWha-Hermann) and 5 (Saner & Yiu) function in concert to articulate I/O psychology evidence-informed policy shifts toward more sustainable livelihoods in practice and some new I/O psychology diplomacies for monitoring progress on SDG-8. These contributions invite I/O psychologists to consider forms of organization—and different stakeholder groups—that may help promote sustainable livelihoods, from for-profit digital conglomerates to local social enterprises and classic management-directed entities to worker cooperatives.



The final chapter in this section, Chapter 6 (by Jyoti & Arora), gives substance to this invitation. It details, as interorganizational cases, a series of ground-breaking initiatives to bring diverse, and often competing, perspectives to the policy table, at regional and supply-chain levels. This chapter also links humanitarian work psychology to the SDGs, through the perspectives of NGOs and other stakeholders engaged in partnerships for development (SDG-17).

## Fair Incomes

Being poorly paid and unable to support a household is a core facet of precarious work conditions (ILO, 2012). The ILO's definition of decent work, which implies *tackling* precarious work, includes *fair income* (ILO, 2022b), including sufficient income(s) to support a worker and their families' material sustenance. This encompasses, for example, having access to nourishing food (SDG-2) and healthy housing (SDG-11). Moreover, as the term "fair" implies, the incomes from wages also have to be socially equitable: part of addressing inequality within and between countries (SDG-10). Wages are a part of that equation. For example, wage budgets for chief executive officers (CEOs) can and do impact wage budgets for the shop floor (ILO, 2013). Accordingly, this section of the book focuses on what kinds of remuneration models, including both absolute and relative wage levels, help to sustain livelihoods materially and socially.

This section is particularly important to our subdiscipline because I/O psychology has arguably yet to have a serious conversation about wages psychology (Furnham, 2019). Yes, we do already have a long-standing specialization in IO, "job evaluation," which was partly designed to promote pay fairness. Unfortunately too, however, job evaluation has not prevented most working people from experiencing in-work poverty and waged precariousness (ILO, 2019; World Bank Group, 2019). Additionally, one of the earliest promises of job evaluation was to help eradicate gender wage gaps (Figart, 2000). Today though, these gaps still exist.<sup>1</sup> Women continue to be not just underrepresented in better paid leadership roles but are also overrepresented in precarious work (ILO, 2018b; also see SDG-5—Gender equality).

Job evaluation is implicated in these continuing inequities because it relies on what "the market" is paying to set wages for any given job (using regression-based wage trendlines). Insofar as the market pays women and men different rates of pay for work with the same "job size," job evaluation can end up perpetuating the very inequities it was meant to dissolve (Carr, 2023). Women are still paid less for doing the same-sized jobs as men, and they remain significantly overrepresented in poorer paying jobs compared to men—who in turn are overrepresented at the other end of the wage spectrum (Carr, 2023). Markets cannot be left to regulate rates of pay because markets regularly fail to deliver equitable

outcomes. Initiatives for market interventions, such as sector-wide fair-pay agreements, are important for tackling precarious work.

Likewise, job design theories, notably the job characteristics model (Hackman & Oldham, 1974), barely mention and do not seriously consider wages (Williams et al., 2006). These theories have focused instead on more purely psychological variables, for instance, hypothetical constructs like “identity,” as if the wage did not/does not matter. Mass precariousness foregrounds the importance of wage income for groups of people who may or may not recognize themselves as members of an emergent precarious class (Standing, 2011). Indeed, even the fundamental “meaning of work” is still researched (Sharabi & Harpaz, 2019) by analyzing what people talk about when financial necessity is *removed* from the equation, i.e., as if pay is simply a “confounding variable.” This *figure-ground reversal* is often done by using the lottery question (“Would you work or not if you won a massive lottery, and why?”). Lottery (question) research does open up some nonfinancial meanings of work, but it has again arguably omitted to tackle the financial realities of mass economic necessity, including a massive lack of fair income due to precarious wages (Bergman & Jean, 2015; Gloss et al., 2017). The reality is that at lower wage levels, money still really matters (George & Brief, 1989; Shaw & Gupta, 2001).

Tackling broken wage-setting processes, and their links to ill-being, is a massive gap in previous scholarship in I/O psychology. Slavery wages, from tipping, internships, and sex trafficking, for example, exist as daily realities for many people in all corners of the world from tea plantations to unregulated construction work to fishing fleets (ILO, 2018a, 2021a). Where then is our I/O psychology for documenting and working to abolish slavery wages? Likewise is with minimum wages, which predate the formation of the ILO over 100 years ago, but which until relatively recently have remained almost completely overlooked by scholars and practitioners in I/O psychology (Smith, 2015). Today, wage structures are clearly broken. They fail to enable many workers to make ends meet, even on the minimal promise of subsistence (Carr, 2023; ITUC, 2018).

Outside of I/O psychology itself, some influential economists continue to claim that initiatives to alleviate poverty and precarity, such as raising minimum wages to subsistence levels or paying living wages, will cost jobs or lead to business closures. These assertions are made without due diligence or regard for decades of IO evidence for the upsides for work justice and work engagement or the downsides for wellbeing of keeping jobs that are poor in quality (Carr, 2023; Neumark & Shirley, 2021). Using jobs as a proxy for either productivity or wellbeing fails to recognize the huge public health costs to humanity and society from indecent, precarious work that features inequitable remuneration (Kaufman et al., 2020; Leigh et al., 2019). Ultimately, the logical conclusion of the current course in many low-wage economies of keeping wages as low as

possible, no matter the costs to worker wellbeing against returns to shareholders, is economic slavery. We are certain that this is an end-state to which very few I/O psychologists would ever subscribe.

The next level up from a precarious or at best minimal wage is a living wage (King & Waldegrave, 2012). Often confused with each other and both hotly debated in public deliberations regarding economic sustainability (Hodgetts et al., 2022), these two wage measures differ in at least three main ways. First is their wage value. Ideally, both minimum and living wages would have one and the same value, but in reality, the living wage usually aims higher than the minimum wage (King & Waldegrave, 2014). The second is who sets them. Minimum wages are set by legal statute: either national, regional, or municipal, while living wage values tend to be set by national agreement or through more local campaigns and agreements between particular employers and unions. This means, third, that they differ in legal status. Minimum wages are normally legal requirements. Living wages are more aspirational, recommended by nongovernmental bodies like unions, certain NGO foundations, and likeminded employers, and thereafter adopted by choice by some employing organizations.

What both concepts have in common, however, is that they are each paid by an employer to workers. As such, employers and their agencies may have a perceived conflict of interest, at least in the massive private sector, between (1) paying a decent wage and (2) the perceived financial viability of the organization.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, the systematic dismantling of tripartite (employer, union, and government) approaches to wage-setting in many nation states has resulted in an imbalance of power relations between employers and workers and contributed to increases in unliveable wages globally (see Carr, 2023, for a recent review).

In psychological terms, and as the UN SDG-8 (Decent work *and* economic development) implies, “conflicts” of interest might be more illusory than real. In terms of productivity concerns, there will be some upper as well as lower limits to what levels of wage will persuade people “to” work as well as being fair enough to keep them engaged “at” work (ILO, 2019; Stiglitz, 1976). The actual challenge though, as well as an opportunity for IO to help address it, is identifying “where” that value, or value range, may be (Carr et al., 2016). In terms of financial viability for an employing organization, what is a wage figure that is fair and inclusive enough to help make the work itself decent as well as sustainable for employees and employers alike? (Carr et al., 2018).

Arguably, concern with where such balance points reside and how organizations can achieve them has been sorely lacking in the world of work since (at least) the Washington Consensus back in the 1980s (Bal & Doci, 2018). At the same time, however, I/O psychology has already charted precisely these kinds of linkages, for instance, between (1) organizational justice and happiness and (2) wellbeing and productivity (Fisher, 2009; Harrison et al., 2006; Harter et al., 2002;

Pérez-Rodríguez et al., 2019). Unfortunately, we know from personal experience here in Aotearoa, New Zealand, that this extant IO literature in psychology seldom makes it onto wage-policy radars, whether in the private or public sectors. A core function of this volume is therefore to help redress such lingering oversights, both locally and globally.

A further oversight from much of the debate, political and academic, about wages is that the spotlight is seldom shone at the top end of the wage table. This oversight persists despite the ILO calling, for almost a decade now, for wage restraint among the CEO class (ILO, 2013). By 2020, the world was facing a crisis of income inequality that remains “out of control”—and fuelled in significant part by a race to the *top* in CEO wages (Oxfam, 2020). The available research looking at the top of the wage-wellbeing spectrum indicates that allowing many CEO wages to become out of touch with the realities of wages on many shop floors is not at all good for corporate conduct, reputation, productivity, or social responsibility (Desai et al., 2010; Jacquart & Armstrong, 2013; Malmendier & Tate, 2009; Rupp & Mallory, 2015). If real corporate social responsibility begins at home, then perhaps it starts with committing to employee wellbeing (Erdogan et al., 2015; Rupp & Mallory, 2015). One way to help serve that wellbeing might be through the implementation of a maximum wage (Pizzigati, 2018). This should be a threshold ratio of the living wage (Carr, 2023). Thus, while CEO wages would still have “elasticity,” they could only grow if the CEO can grow the shop floor’s wages too (ILO, 2013), lifting the latter to, or better still from, a living wage.

Such interconnectedness is not perfect. After all, a fixed ratio means that the top grows more, in absolute terms, than the bottom. But it is still a primordial example of sustainable livelihoods, meaning your livelihood is connected to mine and mine to yours; yours to ours, and ours to yours. Wages in general, and fair incomes in particular, are one—fundamental—way in which connections are recognized and reflected in wage policy. Accordingly, the contributions (in the Fair Incomes section of this volume) all speak directly to relational interconnectedness in and through fair incomes. They include implementing decent wages along connected global supply chains, as a means of combating wage slavery (Jyoti & Arora, Chapter 6). In the chapter on living wages, Meyer and Maleka (Chapter 7) introduce an I/O psychology of living wages across the Southern African region through their co-leadership of Project GLOW (Global Living Organizational Wage). In doing so, the chapter’s co-authors forge links between wages and human capabilities, which speaks to the ILO’s Decent Work Agenda (International Labour Organization, 2022b). This agenda can be further expanded with an emphasis on capturing the capabilities and skills that matter most to people in their own life-worlds. This frontier, and its implications for both theory and practice, is explored in an innovative chapter by Teng-Calleja et al. (Chapter 8).

A complementary form of connection is between production and consumption, in which the fairness of an income, via a wage, can be seen in its capacity to deliver what people feel they need in order to live and work well in wellbeing. People themselves are the subject matter experts in determining this need. A ground-breaking chapter in this section, by Intraprasert, Mohan, and Sombatwattana (Chapter 9), thereby considers a potentially controversial balance between sustainable production and sustainable consumption. From its inception over 100 years ago, I/O psychology has included consumer behavior. Intraprasert and colleagues (Chapter 9) present a modern perspective on sustainable consumption that is informed by ancient Buddhist traditions and their fitness for the purposes of living in modern Thai society, workforce, and economy.

Underscoring the interconnectivity of wages and decent work, a final chapter in this section articulates an I/O psychology for tackling wage inequalities. The chapter's focus is deliberately not on the foot of the table, and the breadcrumbs on it, but toward the top of the table and the relationships between each end and in between. This metaphor of a shared table implies instituting threshold wage ratios, in this case between CEOs and wage floors. To reemphasize the point raised above, central to the concept of a maximum wage is that the top wage in any given organization or sector should not exceed a certain ratio of the lowest wage paid in that organization or sector. Further, the wage floor should be set at a living wage level (Carr et al., Chapter 10). Such thresholds would mean that the top wage cannot rise unless the floor rises too—thereby holding in check and possibly even reversing some of the runaway wage inequalities that characterize many workplaces today. As noted above for example, it might help to lift wage baselines to a living wage, or better still, start from it by making the living wage its denominator (Carr, 2023).

## **Work Security**

Work security has been under increasing threat in many contexts from the casualization of many jobs, rapidly accelerated automation, variable gig work, and digital labor platforms (ILO, 2021b). In response, we urgently need to develop aspects of I/O psychology that intersect with human security psychology (HSP) to allow a broader perspective on how issues of economic and work security are related to a broader raft of personal, community, health, food, and global security concerns (Hodgetts, Hopner, et al., 2022). In this first scene-setting chapter for the volume, we approach work and economic security as a central dimension of human security, which (as noted earlier) also impacts other dimensions of human security whereby inadequate wages can lead to inadequate diets, housing, and participation in civic life, like ripples in a pool. That is, increases in work precarity and hardship ripple outward into other domains of life, including community, food, health, and additional dimensions of human security. As such, the

concept of human security becomes invaluable for a contextually responsive and socially responsible/ive I/O psychology.

In an integrative review of this nascent HSP field, Hodgetts, Hopner et al. (2022) propose that psychology is a discipline long concerned with issues of human security and socioeconomic protection (see next section). We might date early engagements to Adler's (1925) individual psychology. Adler offered a contextualized perspective on human beings that features the importance of secure environments—featuring positive interdependence with others and decent work—in shaping experiences of [in]equity and fairness and in enabling people to access the psychological and material resources to flourish, live productive lives, and reach their goals and potential in life. Many of these sentiments were echoed in Maslow's (1942) development of humanistic psychology, which also offers a dynamic perspective on links between human security, flourishing, and potential as being shaped by socioenvironmental factors, including work and economic security. More recently, calls have been issued for I/O psychology to be more humanistic (Lefkowitz, 2017).

Many of the wider contemporary understandings of human security stem from a foundational report commissioned by the United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security (2014) and drawing on multidisciplinary scholarship from around the globe. Conceptually, and as used in this volume, human security remains a broad term that includes all risks to humanity: including from precarious work. Human security is “a multifaceted and somewhat aspirational state whereby everyone has the freedom from threats, restrictions, and discrimination, to go about their daily lives with dignity and without harm” (Hodgetts, Hopner et al., 2022, p. 4). Improvements toward realizing this state of human security for precarious workers require initiatives to address *insecurities* associated with precarious employment conditions. As noted above, these include income, access to decent food and shelter, and political and environmental conditions that also support human flourishing.

The United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security's (1994) formulation included Personal, Health, Food, Economic, Community, Political, and Environmental dimensions of human security. Later, Carr et al. (2021a, 2021b) argued for, and measured, two more dimensions, Cyber and National, which together form a nine-step quasi-Guttman Scalogram. Hodgetts, Hopner et al. (2022) then drew on all nine dimensions and added a tenth: Global Human Security, to create a Human Security Staircase Scale. This is still by no means a definitive list of dimensions and steps and more work needs to be done to explore how the different dimensions interact to shape the lives of human beings in general, and for our purposes here, those of precarious workers. Further, whether work is precarious (insecure) or decent (secure) can influence all of the dimensions of human security noted above. In New Zealand, for example, Carr et al. (2021a, 2021b) found that being more secure in terms of being fully employed (versus

part-time, casual, unemployed, or retired) was associated with a significantly higher overall score, on their Human Security Staircase Scale.

As noted already, two-thirds of the world's workforce participate in the informal economy, where many experience inadequate social protections, unliveable wages, uncertain hours, a lack of occupational health and safety provisions, and so forth. These workers experience varying degrees of security and autonomy at work, with some engaged in risky, "radical commerce" (Groot & Hodgetts, 2015) as a means of financing their lives and realizing personal aspirations toward self-determination, economic independence, and human flourishing. These work lives can have considerable negative consequences for the persons involved, but they can also feature positive aspects.

Forging and extending that frontier for I/O psychology, Saxena and Tchageno (Chapter 11) consider the sector skills displayed within informal economies and how these skills can be leveraged to increase the security of the persons involved. In doing so, these authors challenge various stereotypes about informal sectors and demonstrate the utility of strengths-based orientations in I/O psychology toward precarious work. Their chapter also reveals how and why many people who work in the informal sector may not necessarily warm to the idea of becoming formalized. Such emergent positive scholarship does not mean that we can ignore the threats to personal and community security that come with precarious work. Rather, it demonstrates that a focus on the problems of precarious work needs to include any potential benefits, strengths, capacities, and agentive skills that emerge with such work and which foreground the potential and benefits of work across both formal and informal sectors.

In the gig economy, wages and income have inherent flexibility, and the challenge may be ensuring that the flexibility enables capability and does not morph into further precarity (Kuhn, Chapter 12). This section also considers the *psychological contract* and how that particular idea can be used to respond to the current global situation in the world of precarious work, including, for instance, becoming more focused on how wages sustain the livelihoods of employees as well as employers (Griep, Bankins, Kraak, Sherman, & Hansen, Chapter 13).

Reflecting the urgency for I/O psychology to address issues of fair and sustainable wages, Seubert et al. (2019) argued that wages have real consequences, and costs, for the wellbeing of workers, families, communities, and societies. Among the most immediate of these consequences are money worries, stress, a sense of work-related insecurity, and actual situations of material and social precarity. In their chapter, Seubert and Seubert (Chapter 14) foreground the importance of assessing precarious work from the perspective of workplace wellbeing. These authors offer a contextually orientated conceptualization of the multidimensionality of work precariousness that can be applied in formulating effective responses to address risks to workers and their communities.



Likewise, O'Shea, *Peiró*, and Truxillo (Chapter 15) consider some of the antecedents and mediators of underemployment. These authors propose that efforts to tackle or redress underemployment, for example, need to be sensitive not only to the employment security/precariousness continuum but also to the needs of different groups, including women and young people. Such issues are likely to become more pressing as the world moves through successive crises and to require increasingly interconnected, cross-level interventions and initiatives. In that respect, a team of contributors from Ireland point to how the rise of irregular and highly casualized contracts requires particular initiatives, including those at the level of labor laws and policy frameworks to promote the social protection of workers (Lavelle et al., Chapter 16).

### **Social Protection**

Social protection is about preventing, mitigating, and resolving precarious work situations that negatively impact the wellbeing and broader life-worlds of workers (Kalleberg, 2018; Munyon et al., 2020; United Nations Research Institute for Social Development [UNRISD], 2010; World Bank, 2001). Related actions include the development of strategies, policies, and practices to reduce precarity and human insecurity through the promotion of effective and fair labor markets and wage-setting processes. This extends to centralized initiatives like minimum wages that are meant to reduce risks to workers. These risks include underemployment, inequitable and unliveable wages, unequal opportunities, and unsustainability livelihoods.

Social protections against these concerns have been evident since antiquity in the form of the *jubilee* in Mesopotamia and rudimentary welfare provisions (e.g., the grain dole) in Ancient Rome (UNRISD, 2010). Contemporary social protections have been expanded to include both the formal (with the present focus on welfare provisions, wage subsidies, work furlough schemes, public housing provisions, etc.) and informal economies (where workers are not covered by formal provisions, using initiatives such as social insurance schemes, cash transfers, or wage subsidies).

Social protection is an important aspect of this volume as it raises issues about what we are aiming to protect workers against, and how we might promote increased human security beyond the immediate workplace or employment space. Recent scoping reviews suggest that the health of precarious workers has been impacted the most negatively by the COVID-19 pandemic, as essential workers are more at risk of infection due to hazardous conditions of work that amplify risks to health (McNamara et al., 2021). McNamara et al. and others have accordingly concluded that the pandemic has exacerbated existing health risks associated with precarious work as well as created new risks that may pertain more to some countries than others, but which can also prove global in scale.



Research into the health impacts of precarious work is increasingly nuanced and is showing that different population groups who are at higher risk of being restricted to such work—including youth, women, and migrant groups—experience poorer mental health outcomes than workers in general (Gray et al., 2020). Scholars have also begun to test conceptually rich frameworks for advancing understandings of how precarious work generates stress that has negative health consequences for people experiencing precarious work- and economic-related insecurities (Scott-Marshall & Tompass, 2011). Such research is invaluable for identifying pain points that can be targeted for emancipatory change initiatives. Key elements identified in relation to precarious work included unliveable wages, unpaid overtime, and lack of benefits such as pension cover.

Relatedly, social protection initiatives enact efforts to improve socioeconomic inclusion, protection, and human rights (Cook & Kabeer, 2009) through the provision of decent work and more equitable distributions of resources in society (Hodgetts & Stolte, 2017). Further, access to social protective resources, in this case via decent work, is associated with increased wellbeing and reduced ill-health at the population level (Kennedy & Hallowell, 2021). Research also suggests that when welfare provisions, for example, are properly resourced, population health and associated dimensions of human security are improved (Hodgetts & Stolte, 2017; Kalleberg, 2018).

The contributions in this section of the volume start at the social level that is most familiar to many I/O psychologists: namely work-life balance (WLB) (Haar, Chapter 17). By definition, WLB involves protecting everyday social relations, and many work institutions and policies, from governmental to organizational, arguably should serve that function. During the pandemic, government organizations and employers alike implemented a range of such schemes (see above). From an I/O psychology point of view, Haar points out in his chapter that WLB research has struggled to include the majority of the world's workers whose situation is neither WEIRD (Western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic) nor POSH (professional, official, safe from discrimination, and higher income; see Gloss et al., 2017). At the intersection between sociocultural and socioeconomic ex/inclusion, this chapter is a call for I/O psychology to be more responsive to articulating the realities and localities of work-life imbalance for many people in precarious work.

While it is important that we document the negative consequences of precarious work, Jiang, Naswall, and Xu (Chapter 18) offer a compelling exemplar for the necessary next steps up in terms of how I/O psychologists can contribute to the tackling of job insecurity. The authors do so by drawing on multilevel analyses of societal moderators of extant links between income, work precariousness, and job burnout across various precarious occupations. Insights distilled from such multilevel analyses result in practical recommendations for addressing the causes and consequences of precarious work, and for increasing social protection

by improving job security through organizational support at the midlevel, and by enabling decent housing conditions at the macro level. Such contributions exemplify the generalist orientation toward social protection as a multilevel phenomenon that produces practical efforts to help workers address issues of precarity.

Likewise, the contribution to this collection by van Hooft and van Hoyer (Chapter 19) exemplifies how traditional areas of I/O psychology, including job loss and job search, can be renewed and enhanced through the provision of evidence-based advice to offer to people experiencing precarious work and employment conditions from discriminatory and uncivil hiring practices at the midlevel to more macro concerns such as unemployment stigma. This chapter also reflects on the importance of adopting a broader systems-based orientation to precarious work and the need to enhance human security through the provision of decent work. It thus links worker experiences and needs to organizational, societal, and global systems that shape the nature of work and life today.

A particularly important aspect of social protection from precarious work is global mobility as many move voluntarily or are forced to move via exploitative pathways to precarious work. Cassim (Chapter 20) considers links between the global mobility of many workers and issues of precariousness and social exclusion and how, despite moving with agentive intentions to find decent work, many become permanently stranded within precarious work situations. Cassim contextualizes these processes in relation to issues of the future of work that have been brought into stark relief by the COVID-19 pandemic, and which hold the potential to disrupt, or accelerate and deepen, work-related insecurities and inequities between stigmatized migrants and other groups in the receiving communities.

In their chapter in this section, Klug, Gerlitz, and Selenko (Chapter 21) draw on their longitudinal research to explore the physical and mental health consequences of precarious work. In doing so, they identify as a key factor how many precarious jobs constrain the agency of workers and undermine their sense of control. A sense of control is a key moderating factor in terms of how people weather precarity and whether they become ill or not (Bolam et al., 2003). Yet the chapter also goes much further upstream to consider the role of governments and government policy in regulating decent work conditions and their roles in protecting all, including and most especially people who are economically vulnerable, in low-paid and unpaid, e.g., reproductive, work.

In their chapter on jobless futures, Toaddy, Crawford, et al. (Chapter 22) invite us to envision the massive developments in, and acceleration of, AI and digitalization which are replacing conventional jobs and thereby threatening the security of the people who have traditionally performed them. Policy options like UBI, for example, are now seriously being debated and in some cases implemented in field trials around the world. I/O psychology has a role to play not just in keeping up with these changes but also—and more importantly—staying

ahead of them. Humanitarian work psychology is responding to the need to tackle precarious conditions at work because of the broader implications of these for people's lives. It has the legs to contribute toward sustainable livelihoods.

## Preview

Worth considering when reading this volume is the Inverse Care Law (Hart, 1971) whereby those who need help the least tend to consume the most attention and support from health systems. The law does not apply perfectly to work, since much of our attention in the past has focused on the middle ranks, not the very top echelon or the floor (Carr, 2023). Nonetheless, today most of the world's paid workforce, formal and informal, as well as many of its economic slaves, are in need of more supportive, and fairer, systems. These systems are multilevel and within our purview.

Overall, previous research and the contributions to this current volume, including suggested future research directions, support and, more crucially, advance the frontier assertion that precarious work is a key organizational determinant of everyday health and wellbeing. Work precariousness is associated with reductions in wellbeing and, conversely, increased job security, and decent work is associated with increased wellbeing (Carr, 2023; Hodgetts & Stolte, 2017; Kalleberg, 2018). Contributions throughout the volume consider the impacts of precarious work on physical and mental health, work-family life, and the viability of communities where the proportion of precarious work is especially high. From this platform of evidence-informed research and theory, a number of future research directions are either indicated or implied.

## Future Research Directions

Sustainable livelihoods is a much broader, inherently interdisciplinary, and arguably deeper concept psychologically than either "work," "occupations," "jobs," or indeed "the organization." If we as a profession and discipline were able to embrace the concept, our research agendas would be enriched and expanded accordingly. For example, we would be asking questions about the interorganizational and cross-generational impacts of decent and indecent work on human security, wellbeing, flourishing, and sustainability. Such questions might extend to whether or not supply chains that respect humanitarian standards have healthier workforces and better educational outcomes for generations that follow compared to supply chains that do not respect such standards. We would, as this example suggests, take human rights at work more seriously: for instance, by researching the efficacy, on both organizational and everyday wellbeing, of standards like the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2011) Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises, the UN Global Compact (see for example <https://www.un.org/en/un-chronicle/un-global-compact-finding-solutions-global-challenges>)

and the SDGs themselves. Most importantly of all, if we adopted sustainable livelihoods as a key concept in our discipline and profession, we could begin seriously researching the links between livelihoods and the ecosystem. This could include the creation of a sustainability index for occupations ranging from worst to best globally and in different contexts (Bohnenberger, 2022). More broadly, IO research needs to ask where our contribution is toward sustainability science and sustainability more generally.

Just as we do not yet have an I/O psychology of sustainable livelihoods, we have not yet seriously and respectfully researched the psychology of *fair incomes* (Carr, 2023). Wages are about much more than money, but money also counts—meaning that we need to make more connections with circular or “doughnut” economics (Raworth, 2017).<sup>3</sup> It is important to engage with these progressive branches of economics that address the human consequences of mass poverty and mass working poverty wages: considerations that are often reduced to externalities in neoclassical economic praxis. Fair incomes imply an integration of IO’s substantive history of researching workplace justice with contemporary issues like growing wage and income inequalities globally, regionally, and locally. Such an agenda is a response to the criticisms of IO research for focusing on relatively middle-class occupations, to the detriment and exclusion of working-class roles, informal and precarious sectors, and unfair wage distributions: as well as overlooking the unfairness of massive wages being paid to the very top of the wage hierarchy. Research questions here include vital topics like how do we calibrate unfair and fair wages in any workplace from organization to digital platform to multinational to global supply chain? What are the consequences of everyday wage unfairness, from all sides, in workspaces and roles? These kinds of research questions are tailor-made for I/O psychology in general and humanitarian work psychology (HWP) in particular.

Fair incomes include and extend to *work security* and through work roles to life-worlds and related insecurities in communities, health, civic participation, education, and so forth. HSP (Hodgetts, Hopner et al., 2022) is a nascent and formative integration of a number of branches of psychology including IO. From this perspective, researching the conditions of work that help to promote, rather than impede, human security becomes fundamental. Questions such as “How do we measure key aspects of human security, including economic security through work and fair wages?” are central. Research into such concerns has only just begun (Carr et al., 2021a, 2021b). The next step, however, is to research the applicability of techniques, e.g., behaviorally anchored rating scales, to help determine what each type of human security, from food to economic to environmental, looks like: and how HSP in general can be promoted by and through decent work conditions? Do raises in minimum and living wages, as well as capping ratios between maximum and living wages, improve people’s everyday experiences of various [in]human securities?

Research questions like these take us into the domain of social protection. As it stands, we can ask of research, “Where is our theory and evidence base concerning the sustainability, for livelihoods, of policy options like basic income (BI), and other forms of wealth transfer, whether unconditional, conditional, or participative?” Shockingly, other social sciences have advanced their research agendas to address such questions, whereas I/O psychology has languished behind the proverbial eight ball. Despite this laggardness, in research, we are actually well-positioned to contribute toward answering important research questions such as, “What functions can, and should, a BI perform? Will a BI lead to wage depression, compression, or diversity, and what conditions need to be fulfilled in order to optimize the probability of each of these outcomes? How can wealth transfers and wages *combined* enable social protection in future worlds in which steady jobs are more the exception than the rule? What roles are there for state and organization, or digital platform, to work in partnerships to enable sustainable livelihoods?” Questions like these are inevitably going to become more and more germane as the climate crisis worsens; as costs of living spiral; as conflicts proliferate; as pandemics come and go; and as inequalities and inequities across ethnic, racial, gender, and class fault lines widen. At the same time, these crises are also disruptors, and disruptors can bring positive changes. This volume is firmly in that camp. While not shying away from the negative, it also accentuates the positive and contains a variety of research suggestions for tackling work precarity and addressing the needs of workers across a range of occupations.

In summary, as co-editors and co-authors, we welcome you to engage with the raft of issues regarding precarious work and how I/O psychology is responding, and can respond further, through well-crafted, conceptually rich, evidence-based, and praxis-orientated chapters. This curated collection of scholarly and applied work does not merely document work-related human misery. It also considers broader relationships between previous research work and issues of human security and sustainability that affect workers, families, communities, and societies. More importantly, the multilevel and joined-up orientation that is foundational to the volume is crucial in extending present understandings of the world of precarious work and how it fits within broader issues of economic, ecological, and social sustainability, alongside UN SDGs. Above all, this is a volume that is meant to be useful, and to-hand, when tackling precarious work to create sustainable livelihoods.

## Notes

- 1 Gender wage gaps exist alongside a range of intersectional wage gaps, including ethnic, [dis]ability, and class wage gaps (see Carr, 2023, for a review).
- 2 Profit is not the only motive for organizations, e.g., NGOs need to pay living wages as well.

- 3 Doughnut economics is conceptualized as two interrelated concentric rings. The first ring relates to the social foundations whereby economic activity is structured so that everyone is included and has access to the essentials of life. The second ring relates to ecological ceilings to ensure that economic activities remain within sustainable levels and do not exceed and undermine planetary capacities to support life.

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