

Precarious Employment for Older Women and Health in Extended Working Lives: A Latent Class Approach

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Introduction

Globalization and structural economic shifts have intensified labour market risks, particularly for workers in insecure and low-paid positions (Scott-Marshall, 2010; Gevaert et al., 2021). As labour market flexibilization intersects with population ageing and rising female labour force participation, older workers—especially women—are increasingly exposed to employment precarity, downward income mobility, and unstable late-career trajectories (Turek et al., 2024; Widmer & Ritschard, 2009; Madero-Cabib, 2015). While policies promoting extended working lives are often introduced to address demographic and pension sustainability challenges, they rarely account for gendered labour market disadvantages. Older women are more likely to occupy precarious positions due to fragmented careers, caregiving responsibilities, and occupational segregation (Ní Léime & Street, 2017; Moen et al., 2016; Madero-Cabib & Fasang, 2016). These risks heighten vulnerability to adverse psychological and physiological outcomes linked to precarious work (Benach & Muntaner, 2007; Tompa et al., 2007). Despite growing evidence, research remains limited in its attention to older workers and gendered precarity, often relying on narrow, unidimensional measures (Benach et al., 2002; Vosko, 2006). This study addresses these limitations by applying a multidimensional operationalisation of precarious employment that integrates both objective job characteristics and subjective working conditions among older workers, with particular attention to gendered disparities.

Conceptualising and Measuring Precarious Employment

Precarious employment is increasingly recognised as a multidimensional construct encompassing not only insecure contract types but also broader deficits in job quality, income sufficiency, and institutional protection (Rodgers, 1989; Kalleberg, 2011; Vosko, 2006). Drawing on data from Wave 9 of the *Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe (SHARE)*, five key dimensions are identified: **employment stability**, **working conditions**, **material rewards**, **social security integration**, and **employability opportunities**. Each captures distinct aspects of precarity relevant to older workers. Employment stability reflects tenure, contract type, and hours; working conditions include job satisfaction, time pressure, physical demand, autonomy, and recognition (Vives et al., 2010); material rewards account for both personal and household income (Olsthoorn, 2014); social security integration measures pension contributions and expected benefits; and employability captures opportunities for training and promotion which are often limited in precarious roles and especially constrained for older adults (Gevaert et al., 2021; Moen et al., 2016). Together, these indicators represent both structural and experiential aspects of precarity, aligning with the theoretical proposition that precarious work is not merely a contractual state but a broader condition of employment vulnerability.

This approach allows for a nuanced understanding of how different facets of precarious work manifest in later life, while ensuring cross-national comparability through harmonised survey items. By incorporating both objective and subjective dimensions of employment, the study reflects the theoretical proposition that precarious work is not only a contractual status, but a condition embedded in broader systems of inequality.

Data and Analytical Strategy

Using cross-sectional data from 27 countries in Europe in SHARE Wave 9 (2021/22), this study includes respondents aged 50 and older who were active in the labour force excluding self-employed adults. The key variable is depressive symptoms, measured by the EURO-D scale (Guerra et al., 2015). Sociodemographic controls include age, gender, education. Analysis was conducted using *Latent GOLD 6.0* within a Latent Class Analysis (LCA) framework to examine multidimensional configurations of precarious employment among older workers. The analysis proceeded in three steps. First, **dimension-specific clustering** was carried out through five separate LCAs, each identifying distinct within-dimension patterns of precarious employment and producing class membership probabilities. Second, a **higher-order clustering** analysis combined the posterior probabilities from all five dimensions to derive overarching employment profiles, integrating multidimensional class information while accounting for uncertainty in classification. Finally, a **three-step approach** was used to relate the resulting clusters to key sociodemographic characteristics and mental health.

Preliminary Findings

Results showed that the multidimensional analysis identifies distinct types of precarious employment among older workers, ranging from secure to highly precarious profiles. Three higher-order clusters were identified on Table 1 (see appendix): *Secure & Advantaged, Stable but Strained*, and *Precarious & Vulnerable*, representing a continuum from secure to highly precarious employment situations.

The higher-order cluster profile (Figure 1- appendix) illustrates how these groups differ across precarious employment dimensions. While secure workers benefit from high stability, strong material rewards, and robust social security, precarious workers face weak employability, limited social protection, and poorer work quality. Cluster composition (Figure 2 - appendix) highlights persistent social inequalities: women and those with lower education are disproportionately represented in precarious employment. Age distribution shows that workers aged 55–64 dominate across clusters, indicating that exposure to employment precarity continues into later working life.

Finally, *Figure 3* (see appendix) shows that individuals in more precarious clusters report higher mean depression scores, suggesting a strong descriptive link between precarious employment and poorer mental well-being.

Conclusion and Next Steps

The findings underline that precariousness in later life is not a binary condition, but a multidimensional phenomenon shaped by intersecting factors such as gender, education, and age. A multidimensional perspective provides a more comprehensive understanding of late-

career employment vulnerability and its potential health implications. This study contributes by (1) applying a multidimensional operationalisation of precarious employment tailored to older workers, (2) empirically linking multidimensional precarity to depressive symptoms, and (3) highlighting the importance of gender-sensitive approaches in the context of extended working lives. Future work will apply longitudinal data to assess causal pathways between employment trajectories and health outcomes, with a focus on gendered patterns of precarity.

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APPENDIX

Table 1. Overview of Employment Cluster Profiles and Precariousness Levels

Cluster	Label	Main Job Features	Group Composition	Mean Depression	Precariousness
2	Secure & Advantaged	High stability, strong material rewards & benefits, solid security	Mostly men, highly educated	1.73	● Low
1	Stable but Strained	Low social security, good employability, higher work quality, moderate material reward	More women, medium education	1.99	● Moderate
3	Precarious & Vulnerable	Weak employability, low rewards, worse social security and work quality	Majority women, low education	3.38	● High

Figure 1.

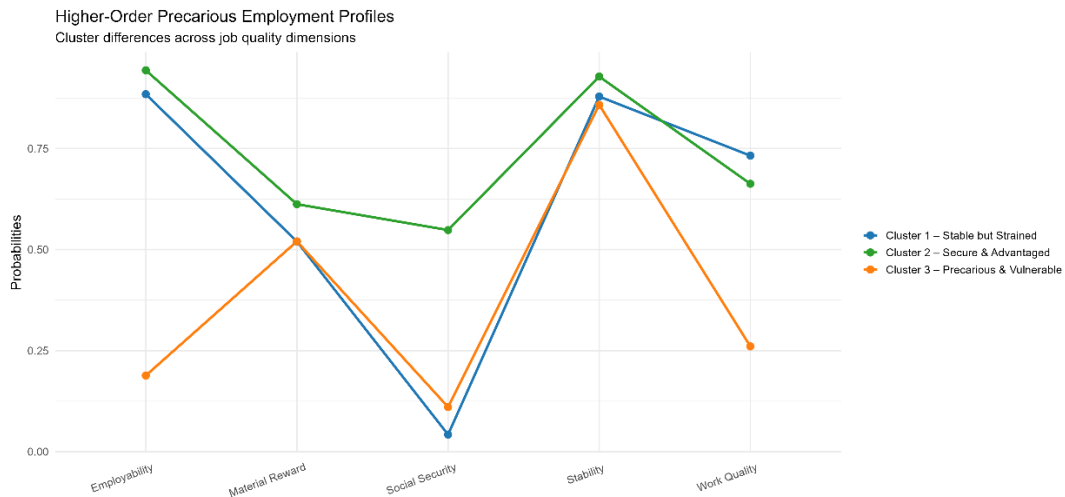


Figure 2.

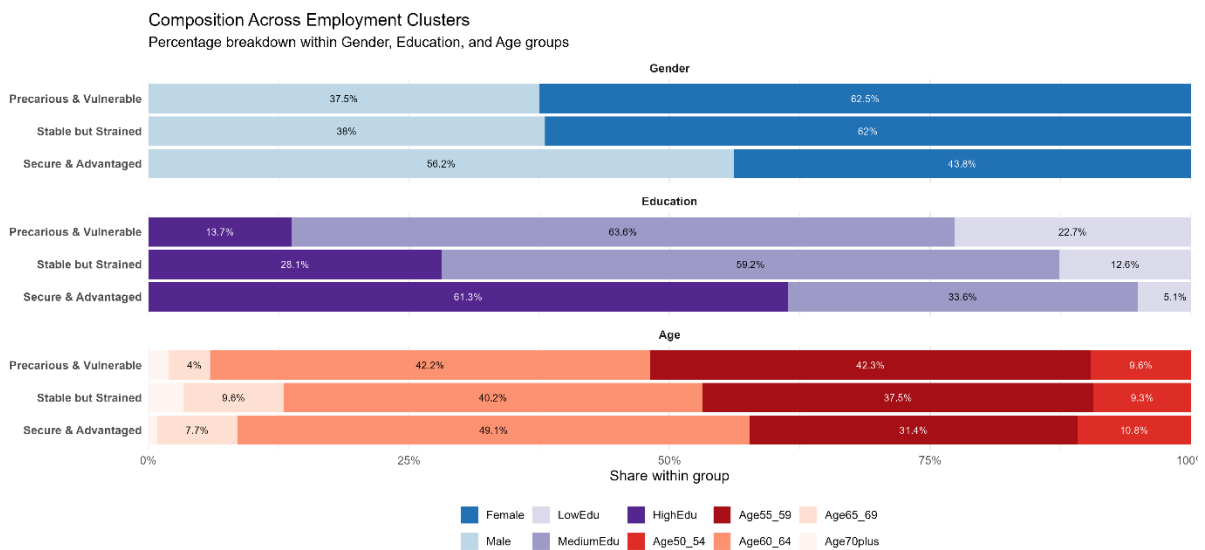


Figure 3.

