

# Innovations

## The Lived Experiences of Contract Workers: A Phenomenological Study

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**Abstract:** *The experience of contract workers is often ignored and overlooked, with many facing emotional and workplace challenges that go unnoticed. This paper aims to shed light on the silent struggles of contract workers, focusing on their emotional toll and difficulties in their workplaces. Contract workers are often hired for short-term assignments with no employer-employee relationships, which can lead to feelings of instability and insecurity. They frequently face the pressure of constantly proving their worth and adapting to changing work environments without the same benefits or job security as regular employees. Emotionally, contract workers often experience isolation, stress, and burnout due to the temporary nature of their jobs. They may lack a sense of belonging or colleague support, leading to loneliness and frustration. The fear of not having long-term job security can add to their anxiety and negatively impact their mental health. In addition to emotional challenges, contract workers face difficulties in their workplaces. These can include a lack of recognition for their efforts, limited access to career development opportunities, and unequal treatment compared to permanent employees. Contract workers often feel undervalued and excluded despite contributing significantly to the organization. This paper highlights the lived experiences of contract workers, showing how these emotional and workplace struggles can affect their well-being and performance. By understanding these challenges, we can better support contract workers and create a more inclusive and supportive work environment. The goal is to raise awareness about the often-invisible difficulties faced by contract workers and encourage organizations to consider their well-being when designing employment policies.*

**Keywords:** *contract of service, instability, isolation, burnout, recognition*

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## Introduction

The growth of contract labor has caused a dramatic disorder in the traditional job environment. This transition has created a distinct set of emotional and working issues for contract workers, largely neglected. Studies have emphasized the emotional toll of emotional labor, which requires employees to contain their genuine sentiments to portray a desired persona, resulting in more significant stress and burnout. (Wharton, 1999). Furthermore, the unstable nature of contract work, which lacks job security and benefits, can lead to increased worry and uncertainty, aggravating the emotional strain. (Chaudhry & Song, 2014.)

Still, the limitless nature of contract labor can provide unique obstacles for women, who must direct the ironies of "noticed while avoiding notice" and "performing a woman in control while hiding the chaos" (Fenwick, 2008). This delicate balancing effort can significantly impact their well-being and career paths. As the gig economy grows, it is critical to better understand the emotional and workplace problems that contract workers confront, aiming to develop measures to promote their well-being and professional growth— (abstract, 1989) (Wharton, 1999).

With the global economy's growing reliance on contract workers, a notable movement has been toward a more flexible and dynamic workforce (Fenwick, 2008). These people negotiate the complexity of temporary employment and the related emotional and occupational difficulties, so they encounter unique challenges that are sometimes overlooked. The present study investigates the lived experiences of contract workers, clarifying the phenomenological features of their emotional and occupational difficulties.

Globally, the emergence of the gig economy and the growing acceptance of non-standard work arrangements have been well-recorded. These patterns are not restricted to the United States but may be seen in many countries, including Europe, Asia, and Latin America. From 10.7% in 2005 to 15.8% in 2017, the percentage of contingent and alternative work arrangements in the United States has increased, underscoring the general character of these phenomena (Connelly and Gallagher, 2004).

Nationally, legislators and academics have taken notice of the difficulties contract workers experience. Concerns have been expressed in the US on these workers' lack of social, financial, and legal assistance, lowering their well-being and raising their vulnerability (Hsieh & colleagues, 2023). Comparably, the "flexibilization" of the labor market has been a topic of continuous discussion in the

Philippines as academics investigate this change's political and financial consequences. (Cesarz, 2007).

In recent years, contract and gig work have become more widespread across industries, changing the global labor environment (Duff & Rankin, 2020). This study examines contract workers' issues, perspectives, and work arrangements in light of the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Contract workers' subjective experiences are captured in this study's phenomenological technique, revealing their daily intricacies.

This study adds to the expanding body of evidence on the effects of non-standard employment, notably on the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. Digital labor platforms and the gig economy have changed employment, giving contract workers options and problems (Graham et al., 2017). Due to restricted job possibilities, many contract workers prefer these arrangements to traditional employee-based employment. (Ruyter & Rachmawati, 2020).

However, contract employment's low pay, intense competition, and just-in-time work can prolong work and volatility, affecting individual well-being and economic inclusion. (Hsieh et al., 2023). These findings support the UN Sustainable Development Goals, notably SDG 8, which promotes sustained, inclusive, sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for everyone. This research illuminates contract workers' concerns and the necessity for collaboration to promote their well-being and economic participation.

Through exploring the personal stories of these employees, the study aims to better understand the complicated reality and consequences of contract work in the Philippine setting and guide policy decisions and interventions meant to improve the welfare and professional growth of this increasing portion of the workforce (Partwez & Meena, 2021) (Fenwick, 2008).

Modern workers choose flexible work arrangements that promote autonomy and work-life balance, making contract workers more common. However, these workers' daily lives have not been fully studied, especially from a phenomenological perspective (Connelly & Gallagher, 2004).

Participants also struggled with "performing" a sense of control and professionalism while navigating the chaos of their fluid work-life boundaries and the need to maintain a hidden or disclosed identity due to their living arrangements (Duff & Rankin, 2020). These behaviors reflect gendered pressures that women

contractors must negotiate under contract work's boundaryless environment (Fenwick, 2008).

Recently, contract work has gained prominence as many individuals opt for non-traditional employment arrangements. The lives of contract workers are influenced by flexible employment arrangements' distinct challenges and opportunities. Research indicates that contract workers may possess a distinct psychological contract with their employers compared to permanent workers (McDonald & Makin, 2000). Their employment agreement is predominantly transactional, emphasizing economic factors as opposed to relational aspects that necessitate a greater commitment to the organization. Contract workers may be less committed to the company's success and prioritize their financial needs, potentially influencing their attitudes and behaviors.

Interactions between employers and contractors may influence contract workers' performance and job satisfaction. Contract workers may exhibit diminished performance due to unfavorable societal comparisons with permanent employees. The perception of trade as social may hinder performance in fulfilling relational and balanced psychological contracts (Chaudhry & Song, 2014). The literature on contract workers elucidates this phenomenon. Phenomenological research on the lives of contract workers can elucidate the complexities of this employment structure.

A phenomenological method offers rich insights into the lived experiences of contract workers, who make up a rising labor component. Emphasizing subjective meaning, this approach investigates how each person experiences contract labor (Pascal et al., 2010; Wilding & Whiteford, 2005). Those who have personally gone through an event will be able to properly communicate its relevance (Penner & McClement, 2008).

Research reveals both possibilities and difficulties for contract workers, including flexibility, employment uncertainty, and work-life balance issues (Penner & McClement, 2008; Mapp, 2008). Understanding such workplace complexity has found benefits from phenomenology (Wilding & Whiteford, 2005). A phenomenological approach enables capturing these subtleties, guiding policies that better serve contract workers and their communities (Penner & McClement, 2008; Mapp, 2008; Wilding & Whiteford, 2005).

The job environment has changed dramatically in recent years, especially with the gig economy's emergence and the increasing incidence of contract labor.

This phenomenon has resulted in a transformation in the conventional employer-employee relationship, with an increasing proportion of people working in short-term, flexible, and project-based roles. (Tran and Sokas, 2017). Understanding these contract workers' lived experiences is critical, as they may give insight into the possible advantages, challenges, and consequences of this changing work landscape. (Broughton et al., 2018.)

The possible gap in the present study is the limited examination of the phenomenological components of contract labor, which can give a more in-depth knowledge of the person's subjective experiences and viewpoints. This study aims to look at the lived experiences of contract workers, namely their perspectives and emotions, and how they handle the particular obstacles and possibilities given by their employment arrangements. (McDonald and Makin, 2000; Tran and Sokas, 2017).

Previous research has explored contract work's impact on job design and outcomes (Ang & Slaughter, 2001), the psychological contract's impact on the employment relationship (Coyle-Shapiro & Kessler, 2000), and the relationship between work and non-work domains in flexible living arrangements (Duff & Rankin, 2020). However, a more in-depth, phenomenological examination of contract workers' subjective experiences is required to understand this rising trend in the employment environment fully.

This study examines the lived experiences of contract workers, highlighting the emotional and occupational challenges they face in an evolving labor market. As contract work becomes more prevalent due to the rise of the gig economy, workers must navigate job insecurity, emotional labor, and work-life balance complexities (Wharton, 1999; Chaudhry & Song, 2014). Women, in particular, face unique pressures to maintain professional control while managing societal expectations (Fenwick, 2008).

The study adopts a phenomenological approach to capture the subjective realities of contract workers, shedding light on their perspectives, struggles, and coping strategies (Pascal et al., 2010; Wilding & Whiteford, 2005). By exploring these experiences, the research aims to inform policy interventions that promote contract workers' well-being and professional growth, aligning with global labor trends and sustainable development goals (Grandey & Sayre, 2019; Hsieh et al., 2023).

## Review of Related Literature

Despite research indicating the unique challenges contract workers face, contract employment has become a significant element of the contemporary labor market. Job insecurity, absence of benefits, and working isolation contribute to stress and emotional strain. Due to instability, contract workers frequently experience burnout and anxiety. Their motivation and job satisfaction are greatly affected by restricted career advancement opportunities and inequitable treatment compared to permanent employees. This analysis examines the emotional and occupational challenges contract workers face, highlighting the significance of policies promoting their well-being.

### Emotional Struggles

#### *Burnout and Exhaustion*

Burnout and tiredness are only two of the mental obstacles contract workers frequently face. Contractors who lack the stability and security of full-time employment deal with particular pressures that might aggravate these mental health problems. (Asherala & Nghole, 2022) (Nwoko et al., 2023)

Emotional tiredness, cynicism, and a diminished feeling of personal accomplishment define burnout—a common issue among contract workers (Pijpker et al., 2019). The unpredictability and instability of contract employment aggravate the continuing stress and emotional demands of the employment, which lead to this condition. The continual need to find new tasks, satisfy strict deadlines, and negotiate the uncertainty of their employment status can overwhelm contract workers. (Nwoko et al., 2023) This instability's emotional toll might cause workers to feel depleted of emotional resources, separating them from their jobs. (Maslach et al., 2001)

Apart from burnout, contract workers might also suffer from increased tiredness from the intense work environment and unstable surroundings. The need to constantly prove their value, combined with the lack of employment stability, can cause a relentless pace of work that leaves contract workers physically and psychologically tired. This tiredness can have broad effects on their general state of health and their capacity to have a good work-life balance.

The literature extensively documents the emotional challenges contract workers face. Widely employed as a gauge of burnout, the Maslach Burnout Inventory has found three main components of this disorder: emotional tiredness, depersonalization, and less personal accomplishment (Lani, 2010). These elements

are especially common among contract workers who have to negotiate the difficulties of a constantly changing workplace.

Several factors cause contract worker burnout and fatigue. High workloads, long hours, and lack of social support and feedback can increase contract workers' mental stress. Poor management of personal and professional responsibilities can also induce emotional tiredness and stress. The employee and organization might suffer emotionally from contract labor. Burnout and tiredness diminish job happiness and productivity, and absenteeism harms physical and mental health. Organizations must implement contract worker emotional well-being policies to address these issues.

This study attempts to clarify the complicated and sometimes disregarded problems of burnout and weariness in modern employment by investigating the lived experiences of contract workers and the emotional obstacles they confront. (Khosravi & colleagues, 2021).

## **Workplace Struggles**

### *Silence in the Workplace*

Insecurity, vulnerability, and a lack of voice channels are common employment issues. One issue addressed is employee silence, when workers refrain from speaking to their supervisors about their problems (Milliken et al., 2003). This study examines the causes of employee silence, its effects, and how to create a more open and collaborative workplace.

Employee silence is complicated, and research has shown that employees often stay silent for fear of being seen as unfavorable or harming their relationships with supervisors (Milliken et al., 2003). According to research, employee silence may be caused by personal attributes, dispositions, leadership style, and work culture. 2019 (Hou & Yuan) The fear of social and relational consequences, such as losing power in the organization, can also make employees reluctant to speak up. In addition to employee silence, job insecurity and uncertainty are increasing.

A broadened strategy is needed to solve these issues. Organizations must encourage free communication so workers can voice their opinions without fearing punishment. 2019 (Hou & Yuan) Milliken et al. (2003) Effective communication methods can accomplish this, including frequent feedback, confidential disclosure, and employee-led initiatives.



Organizations should also give employees stability and security by implementing more complete and transparent hiring rules and offering professional growth and development opportunities. Organizations can inspire individuals, promote collaboration, and enhance performance and resilience by addressing employee silence and workplace discomfort.

#### *Limited Benefits and Lack of Job Security*

Like many other nations, the Philippines has seen an increase in "contract of service" employment (Jurado, 2018). Workers face employment insecurity, limited benefits, inconsistent income, isolation, and a lack of integration with this work arrangement. Globalization, industrial and service industries outsourcing, and other factors have expanded the informal sector, boosting contract-based employment (Etim & Daramola, 2020). Many Filipino laborers struggle to find long-term work and a steady income.

Contract workers worry about job insecurity since they risk getting laid off or canceling their contracts without warning. This uncertainty can lead to financial instability and insecurity, which may affect employees and their families (Etim & Daramola, 2020).

Due to career restrictions, many skilled Filipino health workers left for jobs overseas, losing human capital. Filipino workers may lack paid vacation, health insurance, retirement plans, and employment security. Contract worker income uncertainty is another concern. Their monthly income varies significantly due to their employment status, making budgeting difficult. This volatility can strain finances and compromise workers. Ultimately, contract workers' jobs in the Philippines have caused job insecurity, limited benefits, uncertain income, isolation, and poor integration. These issues require a comprehensive approach considering social, political, and economic factors.

#### **Discussions**

The study on the lived experiences of contract workers reveals the complexities and emotional impact of temporary job conditions. Driven by the phenomenon of the gig economy, contract employment provides flexibility but also results in job uncertainty, few benefits, and psychological suffering. Uncertain job conditions and the continuous need to maintain competency amidst uncertain circumstances lead many employees to burnout.

The study emphasizes how, with minimal institutional support, contract workers must deal with mental strain, economic fragility, and work-life balance



challenges. Emphasizing the need for security, equal opportunity, and policies that promote well-being, this study, seen through a phenomenological lens, sets the personal reality of contract workers.

Moreover, the results correspond to world labor trends and Sustainable Development Goals, especially SDG 8, which advances good work and economic progress. The study opens the eyes of lawmakers and organizations and agencies to solve the problems of contract workers by establishing fair working conditions and support structures that improve their economic contribution and professional growth.

### **Challenges Faced by Contract of Service Workers**

Contract-of-service employees struggle to attain financial stability and professional advancement due to employment instability, irregular income, and limited benefits. Their well-being and job satisfaction are adversely affected by the emotional pressure, loneliness, and lack of institutional support they encounter at work.

### **Unstable Jobs with Inadequate Benefits**

Workers' lived experiences have been significantly influenced by the precarious nature of contract work, which has raised concerns about job insecurity and the absence of essential benefits. Contract workers encounter constant stress, anxiety, and an overall decrease in well-being due to job insecurity, defined as the perceived threat of job loss and the inability to predict future employment (Sverke et al., 2002). These individuals frequently face financial instability due to a lack of employment protections and unpredictable income sources, which adds to their financial instability (Benach et al., 2014).

The absence of benefits, including health insurance, paid leave, and retirement plans, is one of the most significant obstacles contract workers encounters. Many individuals are compelled to forgo essential medical care due to the absence of employer-provided health coverage, which impacts their physical and mental well-being (Virtanen et al., 2005).

Furthermore, the absence of paid leave necessitates that employees prioritize their personal or family obligations over their income, resulting in increased tension and a work-life imbalance (Kalleberg, 2018). This reality contributes to a general sense of marginalization within the labor market, as contract workers frequently experience feelings of undervaluation and exclusion from workplace decision-making processes (Standing, 2011).

The phenomenological perspective highlights the subjective experiences of individuals with job insecurity and benefit deprivation. Workers express feelings of powerlessness because their employment is depending upon market fluctuations and employer discretion (Kalleberg, 2018). Many individuals express concern regarding their professional future, as they anticipate contract non-renewal or abrupt termination, which can impede their long-term career advancement (Benach et al., 2014). These conditions exacerbate the structural disadvantages of precarious employment by causing emotional exhaustion, reduced job satisfaction, and a sense of alienation.

Job insecurity and the absence of benefits significantly influence the financial stability, mental health, and overall quality of life of contract workers. To address these concerns, policy interventions that promote fair labor protections and equitable access to benefits must be implemented.

### *Social Impact*

The lived experience of contract service workers, analyzed through a phenomenological perspective, underscores the profound societal consequences of employment instability and the absence of benefits. Contract workers frequently encounter financial insecurity, resulting in stress, poor quality of life, and limited access to essential social safeguards, like healthcare and retirement benefits. Research demonstrates that insecure employment situations lead to anxiety and reduced job satisfaction, adversely impacting workers' general well-being and productivity.

A recent study suggests multiple contract service workers feel a sense of helplessness resulting from their temporary status, leading to mental discomfort and stress over their future. Their working arrangements sometimes prevent them from obtaining benefits such as paid leave, job stability, and workplace safeguards, rendering them vulnerable to neglect. The absence of stability impacts their personal lives and has broader social status effects, including heightened dependence on unstructured services or government services (Reid, 2005; Tipon et al., 2023).

Moreover, research on elderly street vendors, often including former contract workers, indicates that unstable job conditions compel numerous persons to persist in working into their later years because of the lack of retirement benefits. These workers frequently endure social isolation, health issues, and financial difficulties, evidence of the enduring effects of unstable employment (Tipon et al., 2023).

By understanding these lived experiences, legislators may formulate enhanced labor regulations to guarantee equitable benefits and compensation for contract service workers, thus improving their economic and social situations.

### **Lived Experience Perspective**

From a phenomenological viewpoint, contract service employees' lived experience captures a world characterized by uncertainty, financial vulnerability, and minimal professional development. Workers can face job uncertainty and temporary employment without guarantees of renewal, which causes stress and anxiety (Standing, 2011). Their marginalization inside the workforce is further aggravated by being excluded from benefits such as healthcare, retirement plans, and paid leave (Kalleberg, 2018).

Many contract service workers feel helpless as their jobs restrict them from negotiating more excellent pay or guaranteeing long-term career security. This unstable work schedule often motivates people into a cycle of temporary employment, preventing their access to financial stability and personal growth (Harvey, 2020). Furthermore, the absence of benefits employers offer means they rely on out-of-pocket payments for medical crises, which can cause significant financial difficulty (Benach et al., 2014).

Moreover, contract workers experience social and emotional as their unpredictable schedules and inadequate compensation impact their capacity to engage in family life and social events (Burgess & Connell, 2020). With time, this can lead to burnout and emotional stress.

Developing adequate labor rules that guard contract workers from exploitation depends on an awareness of their lived experiences. To guarantee contract service workers receive fair treatment, employers and legislators must understand the necessity of more effective labor standards, including minimum employment security, fair compensation, and access to benefits.

### **Recognizing Emotions Coping Mechanisms**

Recognizing emotions and learning how to deal with them are important parts of managing the lives of contract-of-service workers. Uncertain job conditions, a lack of perks, and limited opportunities for professional growth are common problems these workers face. The phenomenological method helps us see how contract-of-service workers feel, think about, and control their feelings in response to these problems.

For contract-of-service workers, emotional recognition is important to their mental health. Ekman (1992) says everyone shares feelings, but personal events and social situations shape them. People working temporary jobs often feel anxious, frustrated, and insignificant because they do not know if their contract will be renewed or will have a permanent job (Hochschild, 1983). Workers may also feel less deserving of themselves because they often get less rewards than their regular coworkers even though they do the same work (Kalleberg, 2011). If you fail to cope with these feelings, they can become stress and burnout, which may impact your life at work and home.

Coping strategies are essential for reducing the adverse mental effects of contract employment. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) claim that ways of living can be put into two groups: those that focus on problems and those that focus on feelings. Problem-focused coping includes looking for new jobs, learning new skills, or arranging working conditions to get a better job that pays more (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004).

Contrary to this, emotion-focused coping includes seeking help from others, practicing awareness, or doing fun things to ease emotional pain (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Being able to control your feelings through these techniques greatly affects how happy you are with your job and how resilient you are in stressful working situations.

The phenomenological view emphasizes the profoundly personal and subjective feelings of contract-of-service workers, giving us a better understanding of how their job affects their emotions. Contract workers can handle problems better if they recognize their feelings and learn healthy ways to deal with them.

Additionally, organizations need to understand these people's emotional work and make rules that support their mental health, stable employment, and professional growth (Hochschild, 1983). Understanding what contract-of-service workers go through can make the workplace more welcoming and helpful for everyone.

## **Conclusions**

Contract workers face many challenges because their employment opportunities are extremely short enough, making them susceptible to emotional, financial, and social instability. Burnout, exhaustion, uncertain job security, and few incentives all add to their stress, which significantly impacts their health and satisfaction at work. While contract work can be flexible, it often comes at the

expense of safety and security, leading workers open to mental stress, silence at work, and personal stagnation.

Contract workers often experience emotional problems like burnout and tiredness because they are always trying to prove their worth, meet tight deadlines, and find work in a job market that may not always be consistent. They are even less motivated because they are unable to advance in their careers and receive poor treatment.

Studies show that contract workers often experience depersonalization, emotional exhaustion, and less personal success, which can have long-lasting adverse effects on their mental and physical health. Without the right to social support, contract workers have difficulty balancing their work and personal lives, being emotionally intense, and being happy with their occupations in general.

Moreover, problems at work, like employees remaining silent and not having a voice in decision-making, also add to feelings of exclusion. Many contract workers fear speaking out about problems at work because they do not want to lose their jobs or face other problems. They cannot voice their complaints or ask for changes because there are no good ways to communicate. Employers can break the silence by encouraging open communication, ensuring everyone is treated fairly, and making it clear how to advance in the organization, which will boost happiness and productivity at work.

Another important concern is how contract work can impact their financial situation. Without benefits like health insurance, paid leave, and retirement plans, service workers risk losing their jobs and financial security. Many contract workers have inconsistent income, making it hard to plan for basic needs, emergencies, and long-term financial security. Because of insecurity, workers often have to take on multiple temporary jobs, which can be highly stressful. In places like the Philippines, where contract work is common, social and economic differences make it harder to keep workers secure.

Contract work has societal implications beyond the individuals who accomplish the project. Due to unreliable work hours, uncertain finances, and the stress of being a contract worker, many people have difficulty keeping their family life stable. Some people are unable to receive the medical help they need, which can cause long-term health problems. Others keep working well into their old age because they do not have any retirement benefits. This ongoing economic stress hurts communities and makes the employment market more unjust.

A phenomenological view of contract work focuses on the real-life experiences of workers dealing with instability, job hazards, and psychological distress. Their opinions show they feel helpless in getting better working conditions and the same privileges as regular employees. Employers and legislators need to be aware of these facts and take action to make the work system equitable so that workers feel safe, treated equally, and receive benefits.

To address the problems that contract workers face, we need to look at them from many economic, political, and social perspectives. Organizations must set up fair rules, pay competitive wages, and offer essential benefits to ensure that all workers, whether temporary or full-time, have access to a secure and fulfilling job. Governments should make guidelines about work that protect contract workers from being taken advantage of and ensure that temporary employment opportunities are not causing long-term economic difficulties.

In the end, healthy and sustainable workplace practices that prioritize contract workers' health will lead to healthier and more productive workers. Organizations and lawmakers can work together to improve the lives of contract workers and make employment opportunities more equal and accessible for all individuals by establishing a stable, equal, and competent workspace.

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