

Precarious Employment and Workplace Discrimination Among
Academics in Universities

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Abstract

Precarious employment and workplace discrimination among university academics have long been a concern and have attracted increasing scholarly attention. However, fragmented research and limited synthesis have left the understanding of these experiences incomplete. This study addresses this gap through a systematic literature review examining the forms of discrimination experienced by academics in precarious employment situations within universities. The study aims to synthesise existing research and propose directions for future research. The guiding research question is: What forms of discrimination are experienced by academics in precarious employment situations within universities? A systematic literature review was conducted, identifying 35 peer-reviewed journal articles through a rigorous search of two international databases: Business Source Complete (EBSCOhost) and Scopus. The studies were analysed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and themes, which were organised and visualised using a thematic network diagram. The findings show that precariously employed academics experience two main forms of discrimination: identity-based discrimination and employment-related discrimination. The review further indicates that institutional practices perpetuate inequalities, links precarious employment to organisational dehumanisation, and shows that discrimination is experienced to varying degrees depending on individual and contextual factors, informing directions for future research. Overall, this study contributes to theory and practice by advancing a multi-level understanding of precarious academic employment and by providing evidence-based insights to inform more equitable university policies and practices.

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Attestation of Authorship

“I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor used artificial intelligence tools or generative artificial intelligence tools (unless it is clearly stated, and referenced, along with the purpose of use), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.”

.....

Celia Toan

Date: 19 May 2026

Artificial Intelligence Declaration

<i>Specify the chapter number(s) in your research proposal/research component where AI was used.</i>			
Chapter number(s): Chapter 1: Explore theoretical frameworks for the research topic. Chapter 2: Brainstorm ideas for the literature search string and keyword variations. Chapter 4: Research legislative and international labour frameworks relevant to the study. Chapters 1-5: Proofread and edit for clarity, coherence and academic quality.			
<i>Briefly explain why the AI tool was used (e.g., idea generation, summarization, data analysis, image creation, etc.).</i>			
Purpose of AI Use: AI tools were used primarily to support the quality of the researcher's academic writing, including grammar checking, improving clarity, conciseness, structure, flow of ideas, academic tone, and overall readability. AI tools were also used at an exploratory stage to assist with understanding complex academic concepts and to support idea exploration during the research process. All substantive content, sources, analyses, and conclusions were developed by the researcher from original academic materials, which have been appropriately referenced.			
<i>Clearly state the AI tools used.</i>			
AI Tool(s) Used: ChatGPT, Perplexity and Microsoft CoPilot, used comparatively to review and contrast AI-generated outputs.			
<i>Prompts or queries entered into the AI tool (only the instructive portion of the prompt is required). Include all relevant variations.</i>			
Prompts Used: Based on my research question on discrimination experienced by academic staff in precarious employment, provide a list of established theoretical frameworks commonly used in higher education and employment research at the micro, meso, and macro levels, including key authors.			
<i>A summary or description of the AI-generated output. (Optional: attach output in an appendix.)</i>			
Output Received: The AI tool generated an overview of established theoretical frameworks for each level (micro, meso, and macro) relevant to researching discrimination in precarious academic employment. See Appendix A for the full AI-generated output.			
<i>Describe how the AI output was used, edited, or transformed.</i>			
Post-AI Processing Methods: The AI output was used only as a starting point. Each suggested theory was checked using academic databases and peer-reviewed articles, which were cited as the original sources. Based on this independent reading, the researcher selected the final theories which were relevant to her study. All interpretations and decisions were made by the researcher.			
<i>You may use this free text box to explain the intent for the use of the AI generated content. For example, rather than stating what prompt(s) were used, you may articulate the purpose for which the prompt was used (supported by examples) here:</i>			
AI tools were used at an early, exploratory stage to assist with identifying and organising relevant theoretical frameworks to support conceptual understanding of the research topic.			
STUDENT DECLARATION			
<i>By signing you are confirming that the AI use stated in the table(s) above are accurate and follow AUT's recommended guidelines detailed in the AI Hub and Postgraduate Handbook.</i>			
Student Name:	Celia Toan	Signature:	Date: 19 May 2026

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces the research topic of precarious employment among academics in universities and examines the forms of discrimination that they experience. It provides a brief background, outlines existing studies and presents the rationale for conducting a systematic literature review, highlighting the need to synthesise current research on the topic. The chapter also establishes the research objectives and theoretical framework, outlines the research question, and defines the scope of the review. Finally, it summarises the potential contributions of the study and provides an overview of the dissertation's structure.

1.1 Background

The word “precarious” is rich with unsettling connotations. It means being subject to danger, at risk of falling, collapse, harm, unsound, unsafe, dubious, not firmly fixed and is always at risk - an apt description for the increasingly unstable nature of work in today's labour market (Cambridge University Press, n.d.; Oxford University Press, n.d.).

The concept of precarity originated in French sociology and activism during the 1960s and 1970s, where it was used to highlight job insecurity in relation to poverty, migrant rights, and subsequently broader labour and youth movements across Europe (Bourdieu, 1963; Hari et al., 2025). Since the 1980s, neoliberal policies have intensified this condition by weakening worker protections and job security (Hari et al., 2025; Millar, 2017). In the last two decades, precarious employment has received increasing scholarly attention, focusing on unstable jobs in the neoliberal era (Champlin & Knoedler, 2017; Kalleberg, 2000; Standing, 2011; Tompa et al., 2007; Voulvouli, 2019).

While precarious employment is widely recognised as a growing issue across many sectors, similar patterns of instability are increasingly evident in academic employment, where job insecurity now

shapes the professional realities of many academics. Scholars broadly identify neoliberalism as a key driver of precarious employment in universities. Universities now operate increasingly like corporations, focusing on financial sustainability, managerial control, performance metrics, cost-cutting, and global competitiveness (Rogler, 2019; Roper, 2018; Shore, 2015; Solomon & Du Plessis, 2023a). Neoliberal reforms have contributed to a gradual separation of teaching and research tasks within universities, activities that were historically integrated within a single academic role. This separation has enabled universities to allocate teaching and research work more flexibly. A key result of this shift has been the growth of casual and temporary academic positions, particularly in teaching-only roles (Newson, 2021).

The emphasis on lean production in U.S. higher education has led to high workloads, low pay, and minimal job stability for academic staff (Welch, 2015). Austerity and authoritarian politics have further eroded academic freedom, devalued educators, and normalised short-term, precarious contracts (Giroux, 2014; Loher & Strasser, 2019; Solomon & Du Plessis, 2023a; Welsh, 2021). As of May 2019, in New Zealand universities, only 41% of academic staff held permanent roles, with the rest split between fixed-term and casual contracts, highlighting the extent of precarity in the sector (Lee & Ben-Tal, 2024).

Despite attracting considerable research attention, precarious employment lacks a uniform terminology or definition in the literature. Researchers use various terms interchangeably with precarious employment, including non-standard employment (Kalleberg, 2000), alternative work arrangements (Katz & Krueger, 2019), casualisation (Klopper & Power, 2014; Lama & Joullié, 2015; Leathwood & Read, 2022; Loveday, 2018), non-tenure employment (Miller & Struve, 2020), freelance academic (Izharuddin, 2018), contingent labour (Champlin & Knoedler, 2017; Woelert et al., 2025), sessional staff (Heffernan, 2018; Hitch et al., 2018), and insecure work (LaMontagne et al., 2022). Hence, it is not surprising that precarious employment arrangements include fixed-term

contracts, casual work (Loveday, 2018; Spina et al., 2022; Stringer et al., 2018), zero-hour contracts (Lopes & Dewan, 2015), gig or platform work, freelancing (Irvine & Rose, 2024) as well as involuntary part-time work, and involuntary temporary work (Scott-Marshall & Tompa, 2011; Solomon & Du Plessis, 2023a).

Kalleberg (2000) defines standard employment as paid, full-time work on a fixed schedule under employer control, with an expectation of ongoing employment and economic stability. In contrast, precarious employment lacks this security and involves minimal employer investment in worker skills, experience, or loyalty (Champlin & Knoedler, 2017). Other scholars highlight additional dimensions of precarious employment, including unstable working hours and low wages (Bourdieu, 1998; Kahn et al., 2024), and minimal social benefits or legal protections (Kalleberg & Vallas, 2018). Ultimately, the precariat is a distinct and vulnerable social class marked by a lack of stable occupational identity (Standing, 2011).

Clearly, a standard definition of precarious employment has been difficult to establish. Many researchers are coming to a growing consensus that precarious employment is most effectively viewed as multidimensional, involving not only core components of employment insecurity, income inadequacy, lack of rights and social protection, but also low workplace social support, lack of access to training and development, higher exposure to occupational health hazards, and low work status (Bodin et al., 2020; Irvine & Rose, 2024; Kalleberg & Vallas, 2018; Kreshpaj et al., 2020; Scott-Marshall & Tompa, 2011).

In this dissertation, I will explore the multidimensional nature of precarious work in academia and use the term “precarious employment” to include all the abovementioned dimensions. I will refer to individuals engaged in precarious academic work, including postdoctoral fellows, researchers, and

teaching staff, as precariously employed academics. This can also include postgraduate students who hold such positions.

It is important to note that, while often viewed negatively, precarious academic work can benefit those seeking career development through teaching or a flexible work-life balance (Crawford & Germov, 2015). Some individuals choose to be “deliberate casuals” instead of permanent staff, reporting improved health and well-being as the reason (Keuskamp et al., 2013). Additionally, these academics may be buffered from the negative impacts of insecure employment when they have access to other financial or social support (Bone, 2021). However, these positive cases represent a minority perspective and lie beyond the scope of this study, which examines the broader harms of precarious academic work and discrimination.

1.2 Literature Outline

1.2.1 Precarious Employment

Academic interest in precarious employment in higher education has grown significantly in recent years. Extensive research has examined the poor working conditions experienced by precariously employed academics (Allmer, 2018; Bobârnat, 2023; Hadjisolomou et al., 2022; LaMontagne et al., 2022; Miller & Struve, 2020; O'Keefe & Courtois, 2019; Solomon & Du Plessis, 2023a). Scholars have also drawn attention to the personal toll of precarious employment, linking it to low self-esteem, poor health, emotional distress, and diminished social connectedness (Allmer, 2018; Bobârnat, 2023; Bozzon et al., 2017a; Irvine & Rose, 2024; LaMontagne et al., 2022; McKenzie, 2021; Rogler, 2019; Spina et al., 2022; Stoica et al., 2019). Precarious academic work is frequently described as “hope labour” (Kuehn & Corrigan, 2013), sustained by aspirations of future stability but often becoming exploitative through the illusion of upward mobility or “cruel optimism” (Berlant, 2011; Bone, 2021; Voulvouli, 2019). In addition, studies in this area increasingly explore how precariously employed academics negotiate agency and identity within unstable employment

conditions (De Angelis & Grüning, 2020; Gosine et al., 2021; Loveday, 2018; Paret & Gleeson, 2016).

A growing body of literature highlights the impact of precarious employment on institutional quality and teaching effectiveness (Kahn et al., 2024; Leathwood & Read, 2022; Lee & Ben-Tal, 2024; Lopes & Dewan, 2015; McCulloch & Leonard, 2023; Smithers et al., 2025; Williams, 2022). Additionally, scholars have explored how precarious employment disproportionately affects marginalised groups, including women (Ivancheva et al., 2019; Lee & Ben-Tal, 2024; O'Keefe & Courtois, 2019; Stringer et al., 2018), ethnic minorities (Arday, 2022; Bobârnat, 2023; Gemelli & Closs, 2023), and migrants (Asgarilaleh, 2023; Hari et al., 2025; Paret & Gleeson, 2016). Several researchers narrow their attention to early-career academics when examining precarity (Ballif & Zinn, 2024; Crutchley et al., 2024; Spina et al., 2022; Zhang & Gong, 2024).

The literature has revealed how precariously employed academics cope through solidarity, community building, shared reflection, and peer support (Allmer, 2018; Izharuddin, 2018; Oldfield et al., 2021; Stoica et al., 2019; Welsh, 2021). Others emphasise activism strategies including unionisation, protests, public debates, and manifestos (Russell et al., 2024; Salter et al., 2022; Vatansever, 2023). In the Australian context, Smithers et al. (2025) discuss recent efforts to reform precarious academic labour through a decasualisation scheme aimed at reshaping the university workforce. Fewer works have explored more specific dimensions of precarious employment, such as issues of power and time, particularly how short-term, accelerated, and uncertain temporal conditions limit academics' control over their work and deepen power inequalities (Leathwood & Read, 2022; Smithers et al., 2023). Other underexplored aspects include the roles of luck and chance (Loveday, 2018), and the processes through which precarity becomes normalised (Schwaller, 2019).

1.2.2 Discrimination

Workplace discrimination is legally forbidden when, on the basis of a prohibited ground, an employee is denied equal terms of employment, conditions, benefits, or opportunities for training or promotion compared to others in similar roles (Employment New Zealand, 2025). These prohibited grounds include sex (including pregnancy or childbirth), ethnicity or national origins, race or colour, age, marital or family status and employment status (Employment Relations Act 2000; Human Rights Act 1993). Principle Six of the United Nations (UN) Global Compact's Ten Principles highlights that discrimination can also occur across many aspects of employment (United Nations Global Compact, n.d.-b).

Discrimination in employment and occupation has the potential to impact a range of human rights, including the right to work and the right to enjoy just and favourable conditions of work (United Nations Global Compact, n.d.-a). The Ten Principles on human rights, labour, the environment, and anti-corruption developed by the United Nations Global Compact support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth)(United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, n.d.-a; United Nations Global Compact, n.d.-c). Specifically, Target 8.8 focuses on protecting labour rights and promoting safe and secure working environments for all workers, including migrant workers - especially women migrants - and those in precarious employment (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, n.d.-b).

Despite these initiatives, many studies reported various forms of discrimination within universities, disproportionately affecting individuals from underrepresented and marginalised groups. A substantial body of literature has examined gender-based discrimination, highlighting issues experienced by women such as a lack of career progression, psychosocial risk, underrepresentation in leadership roles, heavier caregiving burdens, and inequalities in access to employment

entitlements (Conesa Carpintero & González Ramos, 2018; Gaiaschi & Musumeci, 2020; Gallego-Morón & Matus-Lopez, 2023; Reilly et al., 2016; Rivard & Talley, 2025; Smith et al., 2016).

Similarly, studies on racial discrimination in universities have revealed patterns of marginalisation, career barriers, devaluation of expertise, microaggressions, exploitation, and linguistic discrimination that hinder the participation and advancement of racial and ethnic minorities (Gatwiri & Krupka, 2025; Horn, 2017; Lander & Santoro, 2017; Liera & Rodgers, 2025).

More recent scholarship has turned to intersectional discrimination, recognising that individuals who occupy multiple marginalised identities, such as women of colour or academics from minority backgrounds, often experience compounded and unique forms of disadvantage that cannot be understood by examining a single dimension of identity (Belluigi et al., 2024; Carreri et al., 2024; Osho & Alorme, 2025). Together, these studies underscore the complexity and persistence of discrimination in universities.

Discrimination can be understood from both objective and subjective perspectives. Objective discrimination refers to observable and measurable unequal treatment of individuals or groups based on a particular characteristic, status, or group membership, which can be identified through empirical evidence such as audits, statistical analyses, legal records, or documented outcomes. (Pager & Shepherd, 2008). Subjective discrimination refers to an individual's perception or personal experience of being treated unfairly because of a particular characteristic, status, or group membership, regardless of whether the discriminatory act can be independently verified (Pager & Shepherd, 2008). In this study, both perspectives will be considered where they are reported in the literature.

1.3 Rationale for the Research

Overall, research on precarious employment in universities is extensive and diverse but often remains fragmented. While a consistent theme across the literature is the negative experiences associated with precarious academic work, few studies explicitly link these experiences to forms of discrimination. In other words, there has been limited research into how precariously employed academics experience discrimination, and furthermore, whether it is clearly identifiable or subtly embedded in their working conditions and treatment. As a result, this dimension remains underexplored, leaving our understanding incomplete and lacking a coherent synthesis.

A recent systematic literature review by Sim and Bierema (2025) analysed academic precarity through an intersectional lens, showing how precariousness is embedded in transnational academic capitalism and how intersectionality can be used as a reflexive and practical tool - through teaching, research, and service - to resist and challenge the precarious academy. Solomon and Du Plessis (2023a) qualitative evidence synthesis examined the experiences of precariously employed academics, identifying five key themes: structural causes, coping strategies, gendered aspects, and impacts on individuals and institutions. However, both studies overlook a critical dimension: the role of systemic discrimination, which goes beyond general structural causes to shape who bears the greatest burden of precarious employment and how their insecurity is intensified - a reality that demands closer examination.

While precarious employment and workplace discrimination are conceptually distinct, they often occur together, reinforce one another, and lead to similar forms of inequality, exclusion, and harm. Understanding these overlaps is essential for a deeper insight into precarity through a social justice lens. This study contends that a dedicated systematic literature review, focusing specifically on synthesising current evidence of discrimination faced by precariously employed academics in universities is therefore warranted.

1.4 Research Objective, Theoretical Framework and Research Question

This study uses a systematic literature review to synthesise and examine research about the experiences of academics in universities resulting from precarious employment, and how those experiences relate to recognised forms of workplace discrimination. The review will focus on the experiences of these academics at the micro, or individual level and examine how various forms of discrimination, such as those based on race, gender, occupational age, immigration status, and their intersectional dimensions, manifest in the lives of precariously employed academics. In addition to individual-level accounts, the review will consider structural and institutional dimensions that shape those experiences. These additional angles will help contextualise the micro-level experiences of precariously employed academics within the broader systemic inequalities they encounter in universities.

Together, these elements define the scope of the systematic literature review, which focuses on precariously employed academics in universities, examines their experiences of discrimination at the micro level, and situates these experiences within meso and macro level structures of inequality. The review will therefore use a multi-level theoretical framework, namely Labour Market Segmentation (macro and meso), Inequality Regime (meso), and Intersectionality (micro), as the three main theories to investigate the topic. Labour Market Segmentation Theory (Doeringer & Piore, 1971) explains structural divisions in academic employment, for example, tenured vs casualised roles, and how institutions and broader systems, like the labour market or government policy, are organised in ways that create segmentation. Acker's (2006) Inequality Regimes conceptual framework helps us analyse how institutions reproduce inequality through normalised practices. Intersectionality Theory (Crenshaw, 1991) helps us understand how multiple social identities, such as gender, race, age, and migration status, intersect to shape the lived experiences of discrimination among academics within those structures.

Therefore, a research question has been developed as follows:

What forms of discrimination are experienced by academic staff in precarious employment situations in universities?

1.5 Contribution

The findings of this review seek to make four key contributions. First, to deepen our understanding of how systemic inequality affects precariously employed academics, thereby making visible their often-overlooked experiences and examining whether certain forms of precarious employment may be classified as discriminatory practices. Secondly, the review will inform future research by examining whether precarious employment and workplace discrimination are distinct or interconnected issues.

Next, the findings will offer valuable insights for academics, unions and university policymakers seeking evidence-based strategies to improve fairness and working conditions in academia. Lastly, this research contributes to broader global development agendas by aligning with several United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specifically SDG 3: Good Health and Well-Being, SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth, and SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, n.d.-a). It also supports the strategic objectives of the International Labour Organisation, which include promoting fundamental rights at work, enhancing opportunities for decent employment and income, and strengthening the effectiveness and coverage of social protection systems (International Labour Organisation, n.d.).

1.6 Dissertation Structure

This dissertation is structured into five chapters. Following the introductory chapter, Chapter Two outlines the research design used for the systematic literature review, including the review

approach, research procedures, literature search and selection processes guided by the PRISMA framework, as well as the methods of data analysis and synthesis. Chapter Three presents the findings from the thematic analysis, highlighting key themes and patterns related to the forms of discrimination experienced by the precariously employed academics. Chapter Four offers an in-depth discussion of the findings in relation to existing research and theory, identifying gaps and outlining broader implications. Finally, Chapter Five concludes the study by summarising its key contributions, acknowledging its limitations, and proposing directions for future research.

CHAPTER TWO: RESEARCH DESIGN

This chapter outlines the research design adopted for this study. It begins by introducing and providing the rationale for a systematic literature review, then moves to explain the systematic review process, including the selection of databases, development of search strategies, and application of inclusion and exclusion criteria. Finally, the procedures for data extraction and thematic analysis are explained, including how findings from the selected studies were coded, categorised, and analysed to generate meaningful insights.

2.1 Systematic Literature Review

This study uses a systematic literature review, which “addresses a specific question, utilises explicit and transparent methods to perform a thorough literature search and critical appraisal of individual studies, and draws conclusions about what we currently know and do not know about a given question or topic” (Briner & Denyer, 2012, p. 112). Tranfield et al.'s (2003) seminal work marked a pivotal shift in management research, establishing the value of systematic literature reviews in addressing the field’s increasing volume, fragmentation, and interdisciplinary scope.

A systematic literature review is well-suited to this dissertation study, given the limited and varied understanding of the relationship between precarious employment and discrimination in academia. As the topic spans several disciplines, particularly sociology, higher education, labour studies, and intersectionality, a systematic literature review offers an effective way to synthesise diverse literature and develop a comprehensive and evidence-based understanding (Williams Jr. et al., 2021).

Systematic literature reviews assess articles identified through a comprehensive search strategy using predefined inclusion criteria, ensuring that selection decisions are objective and free from

personal bias (Williams Jr. et al., 2021). This rigorous approach maintains the integrity of the review process and addresses common limitations of traditional reviews, such as the selective inclusion or “cherry-picking” of literature (Pati & Lorusso, 2018; Tranfield et al., 2003). Not only can systematic literature reviews address questions that otherwise could not be answered by individual studies, but they also include contradictory findings, allowing for an accurate understanding of the current state of research and may reveal gaps or insights that could support new theory development (Page et al., 2021; Paul & Criado, 2020; Siddaway et al., 2019). As a postgraduate student, this process helps me understand the scope of existing research about my topic and build a foundation for research contributions and potential future publications.

Systematic literature reviews support replication research, which remains limited in management studies due to management journals' emphasis on unique or groundbreaking contributions (Briner & Denyer, 2012). Replication, or repeated investigation of the same topic, on the other hand, enhances the reliability of findings, identifies potential errors in original studies, and provides robust evidence to inform managerial and policy decisions in real-world contexts (Tranfield et al., 2003; Williams Jr. et al., 2021). Employing a systematic literature review enables a rigorous and transparent synthesis of existing knowledge, aligning with AACSB (the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business) standards that prioritise evidence-based scholarship and recognise the value of robust academic inquiry in advancing research quality and societal impact (AACSB, n.d.).

This study follows the PRISMA 2020 (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guideline to improve the quality of reporting in the systematic literature review. A PRISMA guideline offers clear instructions and examples for presenting the review’s purpose, method, and results (PRISMA Group, n.d.). PRISMA is a widely endorsed and adopted guideline developed to address issues of incomplete and poor reporting of systematic reviews (Moher et al.,

2009; Page et al., 2021). Relevant items from PRISMA's 27-item checklist, abstract checklist, and flow diagram were adapted to suit the scope and academic requirements of a master's dissertation.

2.2 Systematic Literature Review Process

2.2.1 Identification

Two databases, Scopus and Business Source Complete (EBSCOhost), were used to search for relevant literature due to their broad coverage and academic reliability. The search was conducted in November 2025 using keywords derived from the research question, including “*precarious*”, “*discrimination*”, and “*universities*”. To ensure comprehensive retrieval, common synonyms and word variations were included. The search terms were selected because they appeared frequently in the reviewed literature and are widely used in scholarly research on precarious employment and discrimination. This approach balanced broad coverage with relevance and reduced the retrieval of irrelevant records. Truncation (using an asterisk) was applied to capture word variations. Both hyphenated (e.g. *short-term*) and non-hyphenated (e.g. *short term*) forms were included to ensure that relevant articles were not missed due to differences in spelling.

The search string is shown below:

(precar* OR "precarious employment" OR casuali* OR casual OR insecure OR contract OR contingent OR sessional OR adjunct OR "fixed term" OR "fixed-term" OR "hourly paid" OR "hourly-paid" OR "short term" OR "short-term" OR "zero hours" OR "zero-hours")

AND (discriminat* OR inequ* OR bias OR marginali* OR exclusion OR disadvantag* OR exploitation OR rac* OR gender OR migrant)

AND (universit* OR academi* OR "higher education")

To align with the inclusion and exclusion criteria (see Table 1), database filters were applied to make the search more precise, manageable, and relevant. The period from 2015 to 2025 was selected to ensure that the evidence reviewed is current and reflects recent developments in the field. Further, this period reflects a marked increase in precarious employment within academia (Reisz, 2015), which was evident prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and with the pandemic later intensifying trends toward casualisation and job insecurity (Anholon et al., 2022; Crossley & Low, 2021; Han & Hart, 2021). Only peer-reviewed journal articles were included to ensure the use of rigorous, reliable and contemporary research. Grey literature, book chapters, and books were excluded to keep the review manageable within the given time and scope constraints. In Scopus, the search was limited to titles, abstracts, and keywords within the subject areas of Social Sciences, Psychology, Arts and Humanities, and Business, Management, and Accounting to balance comprehensiveness and precision. In Business Source Complete, the search was conducted across all fields, limited to academic journal articles by publication and document type.

The search generated a total of 1,734 journal articles (1,687 were from Scopus, and 47 were from Business Source Complete) that were imported into EndNote. Minimal search overlap was observed, with only one duplicate record identified and removed across Scopus and Business Source Complete, resulting in 1,733 articles for screening.

Table 1

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Stage 1: Identification	
- Articles published from 2015- 2025 - Written and published in English - Peer-reviewed journal articles	- Articles published outside the time frame (2015-2025) - Not written and published in English - Grey literature, books, and book chapters

Stage 2: Screening

-
- | | |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Primary empirical studies (qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods studies) | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review papers, conceptual/theoretical research and meta-analysis |
|---|--|

Context

-
- | | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Institutional setting – limited to studies conducted in public or private universities only | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Studies conducted outside university settings (e.g., institutes of technology, community colleges, or university colleges)• Studies that discuss higher education generally without specific reference to universities• Studies that combine universities with other institutions (e.g., research institutes, colleges, private companies, government centres, or community organisations) without reporting separate findings for universities |
|---|---|

Sample

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|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Academic staff in non-permanent and precarious teaching and/or research positions• PhD candidates and postdoctoral individuals/early-career academics in precarious academic positions• Studies that include both permanent and non-permanent academics but report findings separately, allowing analysis separate from permanent academics• Academics who were previously on precarious contracts but have since secured permanent positions or left academia | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Workers in precarious employment outside academia, or university staff in non-academic precarious roles• Academic roles outside teaching/research (e.g., outreach, advisory, or tutoring without formal academic affiliation)• Studies that include both permanent and non-permanent academics but do not report the findings separately for each employment group |
|---|--|

Focus

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Studies reporting findings on discrimination experienced by academics in precarious employment, including discrimination based on a prohibited ground and/or discriminatory employment practices | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Studies on precarious academic employment that do not discuss or analyse any types of discrimination |
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2.2.2 Screening

The screening of the 1,733 articles was carried out in two stages: title and abstract screening, and full text screening, to determine if they met the inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Firstly, only primary empirical studies were included, omitting conceptual, meta-analysis and review papers. Secondary research is excluded as they do not provide new primary data, and analysing these will lead to double-counting evidence or over-representing certain voices.

The review focuses on precarious employment within universities, excluding other higher education institutions such as institutes of technology and community colleges. Universities differ from other higher education institutions in terms of employment structures, expectations around research, and governance mechanisms (Universities New Zealand, n.d.). These distinctions influence the nature and experience of precarious employment and warrant specific analysis.

The review included studies reporting on discrimination experienced by academics in precarious or non-permanent teaching and/or research roles, including early-career academics and postdoctoral staff, where findings for precarious staff were reported separately. Studies on precarious academic employment that did not examine discrimination were excluded. Examples of some of the excluded studies are provided in Table 2:

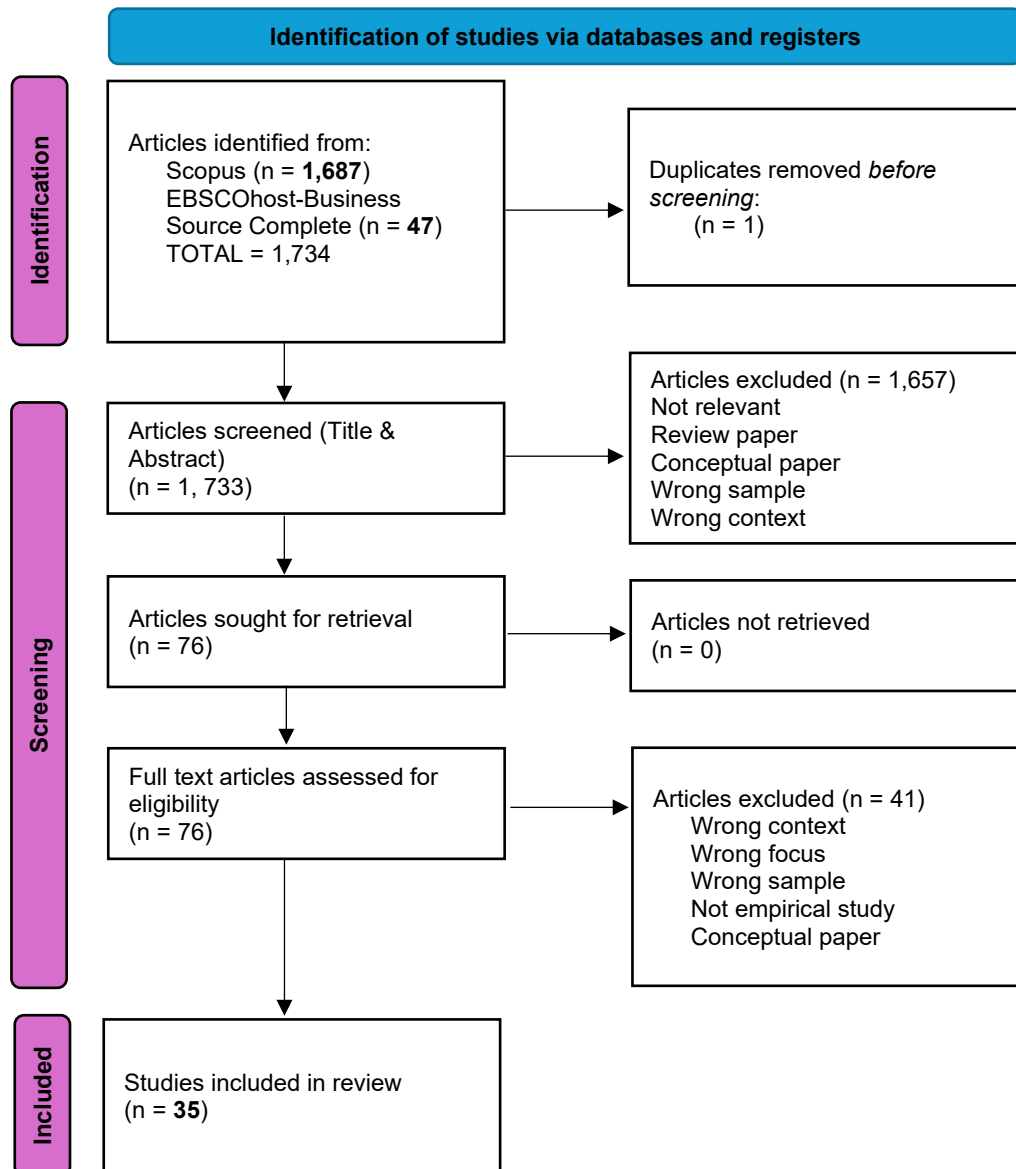
Table 2*Excluded Studies*

Study	Reason for exclusion
Crimmins et al. (2016); Edwards et al. (2025); Navarro (2017)	Conceptual paper
Denney (2023); Norkus et al. (2016); Pham et al. (2022); Villar-Aguilés and Obiol-Francés (2022)	<i>Wrong sample</i> Sample included studies on permanent academics, hybrid roles (combination of academic and professional/administrative work), etc.
Gilbert (2017); Hari et al. (2025); Jones (2023); Kim and Lee (2021); Palmer et al. (2018)	<i>Wrong focus</i> Sample included precariously employed academics, but the focus fell outside the inclusion criteria (e.g. professional identity, mobility, work integration, career breaks, transitions from irregular to regular university job, friendship, training models)
Albaos (2025); Docka-Filipek and Stone (2021); Gironzetti and Muñoz-Basols (2025); Harris et al. (2023); Németh et al. (2024); Tardos and Paksi (2024)	<i>Wrong context</i> Included institutions outside universities, such as research institutes, private companies, etc.

After screening titles and abstracts, reviewing full texts, and applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria, 35 articles remained and were included in the review (See Figure 1).

Figure 1

PRISMA 2020 Flow Chart



2.2.3 Data Extraction

Relevant data from the selected 35 articles were extracted into a table on an Excel sheet. The extracted information included: author, year of publication, country, research question/aim, methodology, sample, theory used, key findings, and limitations. The full data extraction table is provided in Appendix B. The data extraction fields were selected to ensure that each study could be systematically compared in terms of context, design, and contribution to the research question. For

example, the year of publication was included to identify temporal trends in the literature, while the country of study was extracted to understand the geographical distribution and contextual differences across studies. Key findings were recorded to capture the main contribution of each article and to support the final synthesis. Some information, such as theory used and study limitations, was not explicitly reported in several studies and was therefore recorded as “not stated” where applicable.

2.2.4 Data Analysis

The analysis employed a hybrid approach drawing on Braun and Clarke’s (2019; 2022) reflexive thematic analysis and Attride-Stirling’s (2001) thematic networks. Thematic analysis provides a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns or themes within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Braun & Clarke, 2022) emphasises that the researcher is actively involved in constructing interpretations and themes, rather than simply discovering objective themes that already exist in the data. Thematic networks provide a structured way to organise and visually represent the outcomes of thematic analysis, supporting the interpretation of themes (Attride-Stirling, 2001).

Data coding was carried out by analysing the findings and discussion sections of each article. Codes represent the most basic segments of raw data that can be meaningfully interpreted in relation to the research topic, identifying semantic or latent features of interest (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Coding reduces the large volume of data and organises it into a more manageable form (Gray, 2018). An inductive approach involves a bottom-up process in which codes and themes are developed primarily from patterns and meanings identified within the data itself, while a deductive approach is a top-down process in which existing concepts, ideas, or theories guide the coding and interpretation of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Thus, inductive coding remains closely grounded

in the content of the data, whereas deductive coding applies concepts brought to the analysis by the researcher.

The analysis in this study incorporated both inductive and deductive processes, with themes initially grounded in the data while existing concepts and theoretical perspectives were also considered during their development and interpretation. The thematic analysis was conducted systematically and transparently, with the analytical process recorded and documented to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings (Nowell et al., 2017).

Table 3

Examples of Data Coding

Study	Key Findings	Initial Code
Arday (2022)	The employment status of many participants within their universities was ambiguous, which is symptomatic of a sector that often poorly defines precarious work. Commonly, this involves the absence of pension benefits, maternity pay and sick pay..... and absence of clarity about the rights of employeesp. 524.	• Unclear employment status • Absence of benefits • Unclear employee rights
Mason and Megoran (2021)	Her essential point was that her manager was the grant-holder whose money enabled her to remain at the university, but he directed all her energies towards his own research goals, without consideration of her career hopes....p. 49.	• Lack of agency • Blocked career development
Varea et al. (2021)	While unpaid work may be illegal in some countries, in Argentina's higher education system, it is often considered necessary in order to later secure a position as an academic. ... These unpaid positions in higher education normalize and encourage unpaid work and can result in a vicious circle whereby new lecturers are not appointed because the work is done by unpaid ECAs. p. 693.	• Unpaid work undertaken to secure academic jobs • Normalisation of unpaid work • Exploitation of ECAs

The stages in the analysis process are described in the table below (Table 4):

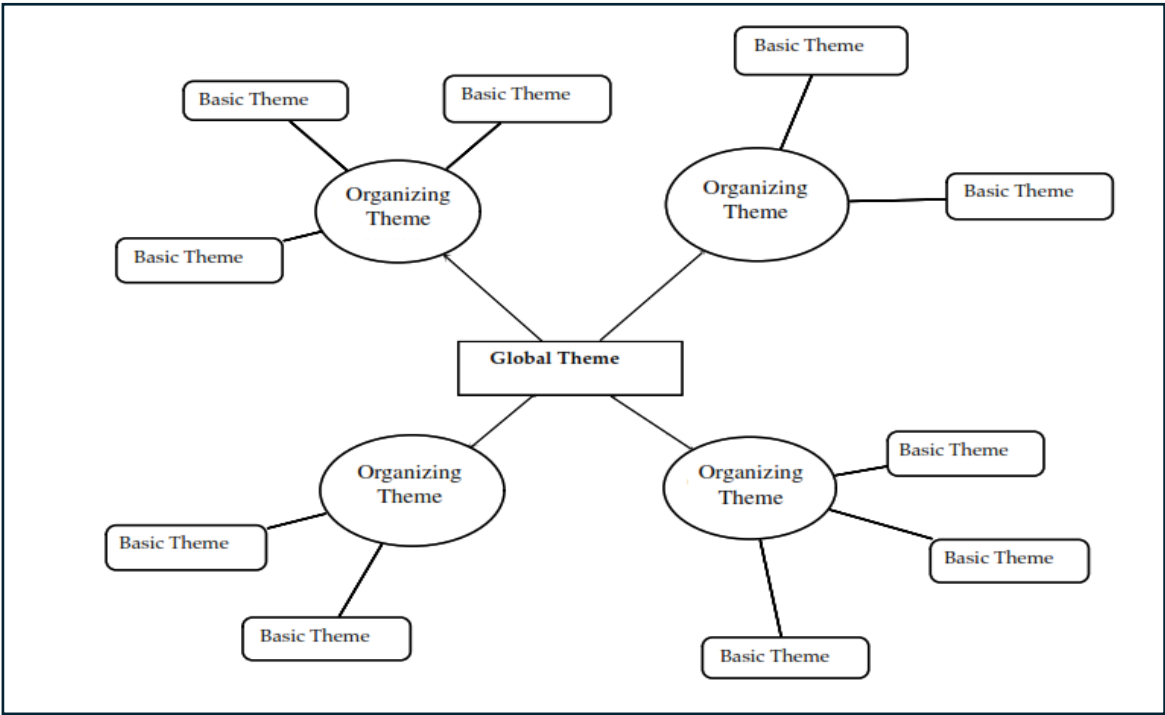
Table 4

Thematic Analysis and Thematic Networks Process

Stage	Description
1. Data Familiarisation	Getting familiar with the data by reading and re-reading the dataset, which consisted of the Findings and Discussion sections from the selected peer-reviewed articles. Initial impressions and noteworthy ideas were recorded to support subsequent coding (Braun & Clarke, 2006).
2. Generating Initial Codes	Inductively coding meaningful features across the dataset using a flexible, systematic approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006).
3. Searching for Basic Themes	Collating related codes into preliminary basic themes, representing simple and fundamental premises in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Attride-Stirling, 2001). Basic themes were developed inductively and deductively, with deductive themes guided by recognised forms of discrimination.
4. Creating Organising Themes	Grouping basic themes into broader organising themes that synthesise key ideas that emerge across multiple basic themes (Attride-Stirling, 2001). These were developed using both inductive insights and deductive guidance from discrimination frameworks.
5. Creating a Global Theme	Aggregating organising themes into an overarching global theme that presents an argument, a position or an assertion about the topic (Attride-Stirling, 2001). The global theme aligns with recognised forms of discrimination, including prohibited grounds in law and employment-related discrimination identified in UN Principle 6 (See Figure 2).

Figure 2

Structure of a Thematic Network



(Attride-Stirling, 2001, p. 388)

CHAPTER THREE: FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings of the systematic literature review examining the experiences of academic staff in precarious employment situations in universities. It is organised into two main sections. The first section provides an overview of the study characteristics, including the frequency of articles by country, the frequency of articles by year, methodological approaches, sample sizes, and participant characteristics. The second section presents the thematic analysis findings in relation to the research question.

3.1 Study Characteristics

This section presents descriptive information about the 35 articles that were included in the final sample following the study identification and selection process.

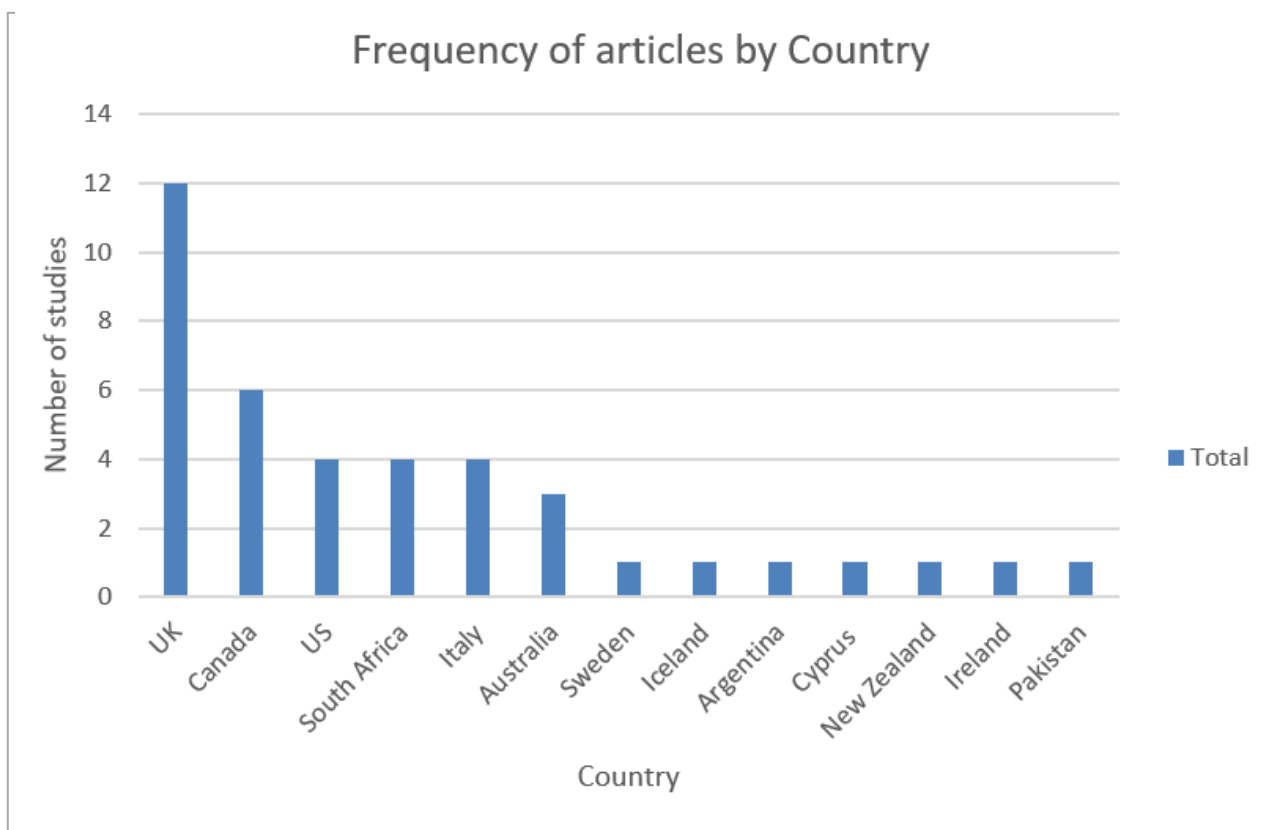
3.1.1 *Frequency of Articles by Country*

Figure 3 shows the countries where the journal studies were conducted. The graph indicates that most studies were carried out in Western countries. The United Kingdom - UK (n = 12) appears most frequently. Studies referring to England, English universities, or British universities were coded as UK, as these articles (Mason & Megoran, 2021; Rao et al., 2021) did not treat England as a separate case. Other countries represented include Canada (n = 6), the US, South Africa, and Italy (n = 4 each), Australia (n = 3), and Sweden, Iceland, Argentina, Cyprus, New Zealand, Ireland, and Pakistan (n = 1 each). There is a clear gap in research from non-Western contexts, particularly Asia and South America, with only one study identified from each of these regions. Notably, East Asia is absent from the sample, despite countries such as Japan, South Korea, China (including Hong Kong), and Singapore being home to some of the world's top universities. Some studies included more than one country, such as Kınikoğlu and Can (2025) (UK and US), Meletiadou (2024) (Cyprus and UK), Stewart et al. (2021) (Canada and US), and Varea et al. (2021) (Argentina,

Sweden and Australia). As these studies span multiple countries, each country was counted separately and treated as an individual entry in the analysis. The geographical distribution indicates that the existing research is predominantly drawn from international contexts, with Western countries particularly well represented. However, New Zealand was represented by only one study, highlighting the limited availability of New Zealand-specific research within the reviewed literature.

Figure 3

Frequency of Articles by Country



3.1.2 Frequency of Articles by Year

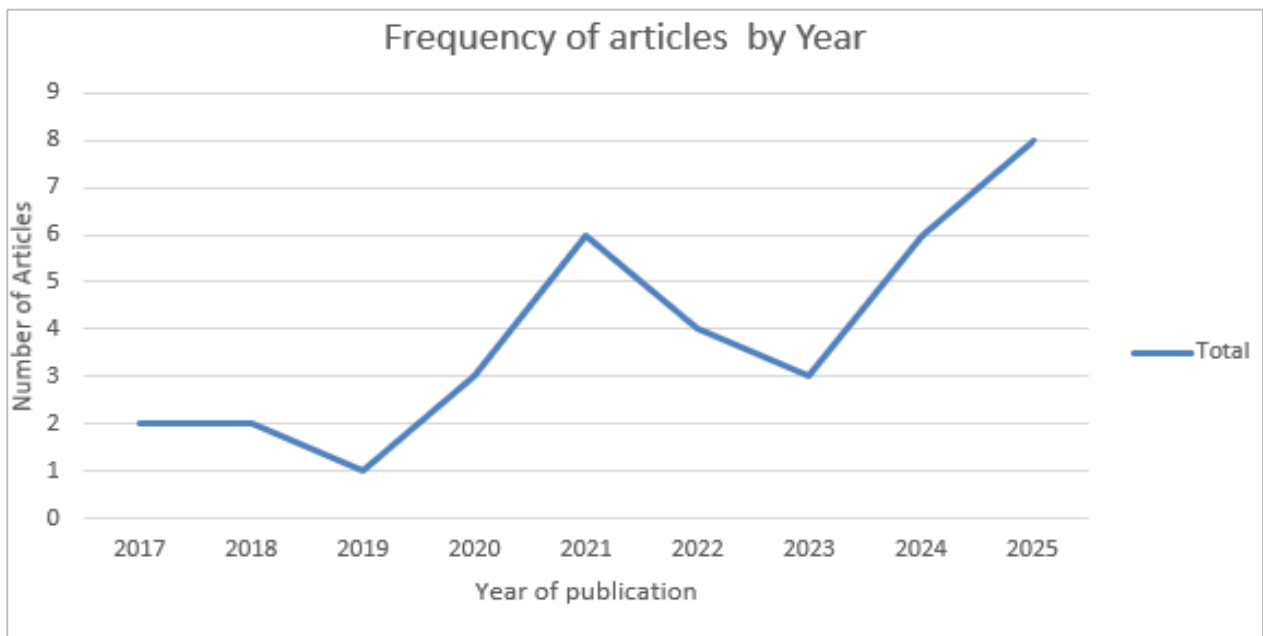
Figure 4 presents the publication frequency of the included articles from 2015 to 2025. No studies meeting the review's inclusion and exclusion criteria were identified in 2015 or 2016, and only a small number appeared in 2017 and 2018 ($n = 2$ each) and in 2019 ($n = 1$). However, after 2019,

publication activity increased (2020: $n = 3$; 2021: $n = 6$), followed by a decline in 2022 ($n = 4$) and 2023 ($n = 3$).

Interestingly, the rise between 2019 and 2021 aligns with the COVID-19 pandemic period. The global pandemic created new challenges and highlighted existing issues, which likely encouraged more researchers to investigate precarious employment during that period (Kınıkoğlu & Can, 2021; Rao et al., 2021; Smele et al., 2021; Stewart et al., 2021; Varea et al., 2021). The slight drop in publications in 2022-2023 may reflect the gradual return to normal or in-person settings, while the renewed increase in 2024 ($n=6$) and 2025 ($n=8$) (Dordoni, 2025; Hlatshwayo, 2025; Khosa et al., 2025; Stewart et al., 2024) suggests that interest in this area has continued as the long-term impacts of the pandemic become clearer.

Figure 4

Frequency of Articles by Year



3.1.3 Methodological Approaches

The included studies used predominantly qualitative methodologies, especially semi-structured interviews, supplemented by mixed-methods designs, narrative and autoethnographic approaches, visual methods, surveys, discourse and statistical analysis.

3.1.4 Sample Sizes and Participant Characteristics

Sample sizes ranged from small qualitative groups of 3–34 participants to large survey samples of over 150 academic staff. Across the studies, participants were predominantly precariously employed academics, including early-career academics/researchers, postdoctoral fellows, adjuncts, sessional instructors, doctoral students, and temporary or fixed-term teaching staff. Several studies focused specifically on Black, minority ethnic, immigrant, or women academics. Participants represented a wide range of disciplines, primarily within science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), and the social sciences and humanities (SSH), while professional and practice-based fields (e.g. accounting, law, medicine, and physical education) were less represented.

3.2 Basic Themes

The following section discusses the basic themes that emerged through the coding process. In total, 19 basic themes related to the research question were identified, as illustrated in the table below:

Table 5

Basic Themes

Basic Theme	Examples of Related Codes
1. Gender bias	• Higher unpaid work burden for female assistant professors (De Angelis & Grüning, 2020) • Gendered assignment of administrative and caregiving roles to women (Kınıkoğlu & Can, 2025) • Women performing academic housework that benefits male colleagues (Morris, 2025)
2. Racialised barriers	• Unrecognised labour disproportionately carried by staff of colour (Arday, 2022)

	• Language and cultural barriers restricting networking and advancement (Morris, 2025) • Ethnicity-related barriers to career progression (Myers, 2022) • Black precariously employed academics are unable to challenge abuse (Schofield, 2022)
3. Migrant academic oppression	• Extended periods of unpaid work among migrant researchers (Morris, 2025) • Precarious migrant status enabling silence and exploitation (O'Keefe & Courtois, 2019) • Discrimination linked to migrant background (Meletiadiou, 2024)
4. Age discrimination	• Long-hours expectations placed on younger academics (Bone, 2021) • Age as a major factor of discrimination in academia (Menard, 2025) • Age bias in student evaluations of teaching (Smele et al., 2021)
5. Family status /responsibilities disadvantage	• Exclusion of non-tenure-track mothers from decision-making (Beck, 2025) • Reduced publication output following motherhood (Bozzon et al., 2017a) • Combined caregiving and productivity pressures on academic mothers (Dordoni, 2025)
6. Intersectional disadvantage	• Barriers to permanent status based on gender, language and ethnicity (Meletiadiou, 2024) • Academic hierarchy shaped by gender, class, and race (Morris & Rowell, 2024) • Discriminatory student evaluations of teaching based on gender, race and age (Smele et al., 2021) • Experience of race and gender discrimination in precarious employment (Porter et al., 2020)
7. Unfair hiring practices	• Use of student evaluations of teaching results as a basis for contract renewal (Kouritzin et al., 2023) • Unequal access to teaching opportunities via supervisor networks (Rao et al., 2021) • Lack of transparency in the use of student evaluations of teaching results for hiring decisions (Smele et al., 2021) • Quasi-permanent contracts dependent on retained funding (Stringer et al., 2018) • Expectation of unpaid work to secure future academic employment (Varea et al., 2021)
8. Financial insecurity	• Routine unpaid overtime in academic work (Arday, 2022; De Angelis & Grüning, 2020; Mason & Megoran, 2021) • Low-paid forms of academic labour (Daniels et al., 2024) • Per-class payment model reinforces insecurity (Daraz et al., 2025) • Unpaid early-career academic role (Varea et al., 2021)
9. Work-life boundary erosion	• Academic work encroaching on personal life (Bozzon et al., 2017a) • Insufficient time for rest and care (Dordoni, 2025)

	• Expectation to work while sick and sacrifice sleep (Solomon & Du Plessis, 2023b) • Ongoing work-life conflict between family time and work demands (Stewart et al., 2021)
10. Heavy workload	• Long working hours intensifying workload (Bozzon et al., 2017a; Solomon & Du Plessis, 2023b) • Excessive workload demands (Kınıkoğlu & Can, 2021; Kouritzin et al., 2023; Myers, 2022; Stewart et al., 2021; Stringer et al., 2018) • Pressure to take on extra work to secure permanent employment (Stewart et al., 2024)
11. Maternity penalty	• Limited access to maternity benefits for non-tenure-track academic mothers (Beck, 2025) • Maternity treated as a non-citizen in Italian academia (Bozzon et al., 2017b) • Career disadvantages experienced during the postpartum period (Nichols, 2023) • Pregnancy and motherhood as barriers to securing stable academic employment (O'Keefe & Courtois, 2019)
12. Job insecurity	• Anxiety over career continuity (Bozzon et al., 2017a) • Employment instability driven by funding & HR policies (Mason & Megoran, 2021) • Negative impacts of job insecurity (Menard, 2025)
13. Job assignments	• Role expectations not clearly defined (Kouritzin et al., 2023) • Contributing to others' grant applications (Mason & Megoran, 2021) • Teaching-heavy assignments limiting research output (Nichols, 2023)
14. Advancement	• Misleading narratives of progression to permanency (Hlatshwayo, 2024) • Replaceable academic labour and denied career advancement (Porter et al., 2020) • Exclusion from promotion opportunities (Solomon & Du Plessis, 2023b)
15. Training and opportunities	• Lack of institutional investment in the development of precariously employed academic staff (Arday, 2022) • Restricted access to professional development opportunities (Khosa et al., 2025)
16. Job prospects	• Good job performance does not guarantee a teaching position (Khosa et al., 2025) • Teaching only adjuncts disadvantaged in tenured consideration (Kınıkoğlu & Can, 2025) • Overestimation of chances for permanent academic employment (Menard, 2025) • Exit from academia due to lack of career prospects (Morris, 2025)

17. Absence /Lack of employment benefits	• Lack of sick and maternity leave entitlements (Bozzon et al., 2017b) • Absence of pension contributions (Hlatshwayo, 2024; O'Keefe & Courtois, 2019; Solomon & Du Plessis, 2023b) • Exclusion from unemployment and social security benefits (Bozzon et al., 2017b) • Lack of employment benefits such as medical aid or bonuses (Solomon & Du Plessis, 2023b) • No access to pension, maternity pay, or sick pay (Arday, 2022)
18. Limited employment protection	• Limited practical access to unfair dismissal protections (O'Keefe & Courtois, 2019) • Restricted enforcement of employment rights under precarious contracts (O'Keefe & Courtois, 2019) • Weak union capacity to support precariously employed academics (Stewart et al., 2024)
19. Emotional & mental well-being	• Hopelessness & despair linked to academic precarity (Daraz et al., 2025) • Repeated contract applications undermining self-worth (Kouritzin et al., 2023) • Mental health support sought due to precarious employment (Nichols, 2023)

3.2.1 Gender Bias (n=20)

Many studies highlight gender bias within universities that disproportionately affects precariously employed academic staff. For example, exploring the relationship between gender and precarity in Irish universities, O'Keefe and Courtois (2019) found that although women spent longer in the sector, they remained in precarious roles and were more likely than men to become stuck in positions with limited opportunities for advancement. Similarly, in their study of precariously employed communication instructors, Stewart et al. (2021) showed that women early in their careers were more likely to begin in precarious roles, such as part-time or non-tenure-track positions, or to leave academia altogether rather than secure tenure-track appointments.

Administrative, caregiving, and emotional support tasks were disproportionately allocated to female academics, and several studies show that non-tenured female academics carry substantially more unpaid or unrecognised labour compared to men (De Angelis & Grüning, 2020; Kınıkoğlu & Can, 2025; Stringer et al., 2018).

Morris' (2025) research on women academics on short-term contracts in a research-intensive university in the UK likewise reported that temporary female academics undertook disproportionate shares of gendered “academic housework” (administration, teaching and pastoral care roles) on behalf of male professors, enabling men to participate in more prestigious activities. These tasks, while essential to institutional functioning, are time-consuming, undervalued, and rarely recognised in promotion criteria. Because academic promotion is heavily weighted towards research performance, these gendered productivity patterns hinder women’s advancement (Alderson et al., 2022).

Women of colour described additional experiences of exploitation and dehumanisation (Arday, 2022), and some universities signalled high performance through a masculine work identity (Bozzon et al., 2017a). Gendered expectations placed further emotional labour demands on women in teaching roles (Smele et al., 2021), reflecting broader norms that associate women with caring roles while positioning men as “rock star” lecturers (Morris & Rowell, 2024, p. 126). Overall, the literature shows that gendered expectations and university systems consistently disadvantage precariously employed female academics in several ways related to workload, productivity, and career progression.

3.2.2 Racialised Barriers (n=7)

Research highlights that racialised precariously employed academics experience many disadvantages within university workplaces. For instance, Arday's (2022) research among Black, Asian and minority ethnic members of staff on precarious contracts across ten UK universities observed a dominant institutional culture in which staff of colour are implicitly expected to carry heavier workloads. Further, institutional racism renders Black educators in precarious roles particularly vulnerable to

abuse and silencing (Schofield, 2022). Ethnic, cultural, and language barriers also restrict career progression and access to professional networks (Morris, 2025; Myers, 2022).

It has been reported that consumer satisfaction models that frame teaching as customer service impose unfair performance pressures on racialised instructors, who are often judged more harshly (Smele et al., 2021). Additionally, Menard's (2025) survey among 179 long-term researchers in UK universities found that 10% of his respondents had experienced racial discrimination, including discrimination based on nationality. Research also shows that race-based microaggressions from students during teaching undermine educators' self-esteem (Stewart et al., 2024). Taken together, these experiences highlight how racism operates as a structural element of precarious academic workplaces.

3.2.3 Migrant Academic Oppression (n=4)

Research shows that migrant academics in insecure roles face significant challenges in universities. Morris (2025) described a case in which a migrant academic was not paid for six months because of delays in confirming her right to work in the UK. O'Keefe and Courtois (2019) found that Ireland's work permit system makes migrant academic women especially vulnerable, as their right to stay in the country depends on their employer, which discourages them from reporting poor working conditions and increases the risk of harassment. Similarly, migrant Cypriot women working in British universities had to overcome several barriers due to language, gender and ethnicity (Meletiadou, 2024). A study by Stewart et al. (2021) illustrates how being a migrant academic with a heavy accent and pronunciation errors/differences places individuals at an even greater disadvantage in online academic spaces, particularly in terms of performing authority and competence. In this context, accent becomes a marker of otherness, deficiency, and reduced professional legitimacy. In addition, Stewart et al. (2021) also found that migrants are faced with insecure visas, unstable job titles, and low recognition, making them feel replaceable and excluded despite their high qualifications. Together,

the array of experiences lived by migrant academics shows how being a migrant intensifies precarity and marginalisation in academia.

3.2.4 Age Discrimination (n=4)

Age discrimination has been identified as an issue within precarious academic employment. Age discrimination was reported at rates equal to gender discrimination among long-term precariously employed researchers, indicating that age is a significant and recurring barrier alongside other forms of inequality (Menard, 2025). In a study from a Canadian university researching how precariously employed academic women experience student evaluations of teaching, several participants described experiences of ageism, noting that scores declined as they grew older despite increased experience and teaching effectiveness (Smele et al., 2021). In that study, some participants, especially older women, reported trying to appear younger to avoid age-based bias, pointing to the unequal expectations placed on women as they age. Other studies show age-based disadvantage by describing how younger academics face greater instability (Daraz et al., 2025); they are also expected to accept insecure work for long periods as a normal part of their career (Bone, 2021). This expectation limits access to stable jobs and allows ongoing exploitation linked to age and career stage. Overall, these findings indicate that age remains an important dimension of inequality shaping precariously employed academics' experiences and outcomes.

3.2.5 Family Status/Responsibilities Disadvantage (n=10)

Some of the studies reviewed highlighted the disadvantages associated with being a parent, particularly for mothers, in which the motherhood penalty was evident. The term “motherhood penalty” refers to the widespread and systemic discrimination that mothers experience in the workplace (Correll et al., 2007). In the studies reviewed, this penalty appeared in several forms, including exclusion from decision-making processes (Beck, 2025) and the double burden of maintaining productivity while managing caregiving responsibilities, which undermines career

progression (Dordoni, 2025). Research also shows that having children leads to significant declines in productivity and publication output for women academics, while men are far less affected (Bozzon et al., 2017a). Academic mothers are often viewed as less capable, less dedicated, and less enthusiastic about their work due to their family responsibilities (Hlatshwayo, 2024). Motherhood status ultimately disadvantages women in precarious roles within universities.

3.2.6 Intersectional Disadvantage (n=8)

Another form of discrimination experienced by academics in precarious roles, identified across several studies, relates to their intersecting identities. Gender, ethnicity, and language have been found to act as initial barriers to securing permanent positions in UK universities for some migrant academics (Meletiadou, 2024). Intersectional disadvantage places academics performing feminised, classed, and racialised labour lower within institutional hierarchies (Morris & Rowell, 2024). Morris' (2025) study in a UK university further illustrates this disadvantage, showing how temporary employment status intersects with gender, ethnicity, citizenship, and religion to compound invisibility and powerlessness within academic institutions.

Student evaluations of teaching often reflect judgments based on instructors' gender, age, and race, resulting in negative or inappropriate comments that demonstrate intersectional disadvantage (Smele et al., 2021). Similarly, Porter et al.'s (2020) study at three different research universities in the US reported that for Black women on temporary contracts, race, gender, and job status combined to shape how they were treated in the classroom, leading to ongoing conflict with students and colleagues. Arday's (2022) study across ten UK universities highlighted experiences of gendered racism, while O'Keefe and Courtois' (2019) research highlighted migrant women as a particularly vulnerable group within Irish universities. Menard (2025) further found that half of the respondents - 179 long-term researchers in UK universities - who reported discrimination experienced intersectional discrimination, with age and gender emerging as the most common

bases. Overall, intersecting identities intensify precarity and shape unequal treatment for academics in insecure roles.

3.2.7 Unfair Hiring Practices (n=6)

Several studies reported instances of unfair hiring practices in precariously employed academic positions. Research has questioned the legitimacy of using student evaluations of teaching results - often biased and unreliable - to assess the competence of precariously employed instructors and determine contract renewal (Kouritzin et al., 2023). Further concerns relate to the lack of transparency in how student evaluations of teaching are used in hiring decisions (Smele et al., 2021). Rao et al.'s (2021) research at two British universities highlighted how some doctoral students relied on close contacts, such as supervisors, to secure teaching opportunities, revealing significant inequalities in how doctoral candidates compete for their academic futures.

Stringer et al.'s (2018) New Zealand study describes how fixed-term researchers collectively worked with a union to obtain permanent contracts at their university. However, despite the title of “permanent”, researchers are still required to continually secure external funding, meaning job insecurity remains. While the contracts provide some benefits, such as redundancy pay, some researchers view them as exploitative and offering little real security.

Additionally, while unpaid work may be illegal in some countries, in Argentina's higher education system, it is often considered necessary for securing future academic employment (Varea et al., 2021). Overall, the findings show that unfair hiring practices can increase precarity and disadvantage in academic work.

3.2.8 Financial Insecurity (n=16)

Across the studies, conducted in various countries, financial insecurity is found to be a major problem for precariously employed academics. Pay and benefits are among the least favourable aspects of the job (Alderson et al., 2022). In South Africa, postdoctoral research fellows described how precarious employment, characterised by the absence of regular contracts and payslips, led to financial hardship and restricted access to housing, credit, and banking services (Hlatshwayo, 2025). Although teaching is vital to universities, hourly pay devalues it and traps postgraduate and Black academics in insecure, low-paid work (Daniels et al., 2024).

A study in Pakistan found that payment-per-class arrangements contribute to financial stress among precariously employed academics because income is irregular, insecure, and dependent on class availability rather than a stable salary. When combined with delays in reimbursement, this payment structure makes it difficult for academics to cover basic living costs and limits their ability to budget, plan ahead, or save (Daraz et al., 2025). Further, research in Argentina and Cyprus shows that unpaid work is often treated as normal and even necessary for securing future jobs, which adds to this insecurity (Meletiadou, 2024; Varea et al., 2021).

Many casualised academics report working far more hours than they are paid for, often noting that insufficient preparation time is allocated and that their compensation does not reflect the real volume of work they perform (Arday, 2022; De Angelis & Grüning, 2020; Mason & Megoran, 2021). Confusion about stipends is also an issue. Kouritzin et al.'s (2023) study among nine English course instructors in two Canadian universities found that these part-time instructors were unclear about what exactly their stipend covered and felt underpaid, highlighting the exploitative nature of stipend systems. These conditions leave some academics struggling to meet basic needs, as insecure income and precarious working conditions make daily life difficult (Morris, 2025).

Myers (2022) found that the reliance on zero-hour contracts generates ongoing financial insecurity and emotional stress for early-career academics, limiting their ability to plan for the future and exercise individual agency. Other studies report similar challenges, including not earning enough to pay bills (Nichols, 2023; Stewart et al., 2021), not being paid for substantial portions of their work (O'Keefe & Courtois, 2019), having no guaranteed income between teaching terms (Solomon & Du Plessis, 2023b), and doing unpaid preparatory work (Stewart et al., 2021). Overall, these conditions trap many precariously employed academics into both immediate and longer-term financial insecurity.

3.2.9 Work-Life Boundary Erosion (n=9)

Precariously employed academics face a growing erosion of work-life boundaries. Early-career researchers often work evenings and weekends to meet deadlines (Bozzon et al., 2017a) and the pressure to stay productive pushes work into all parts of daily life, leaving little time for rest, care, or switching off (Dordoni, 2025). Heavy workloads lead some to sacrifice sleep, while managerial pressure keeps others working even when unwell (Solomon & Du Plessis, 2023b). The constant demands of work conflict with leisure time, creating emotional strain and frustration (Stewart et al., 2021), and reducing opportunities to spend time with friends and family (Arday, 2022).

Many precariously employed academics experience eroded work-life boundaries, by doing everyday tasks such as answering student messages at all hours or marking during times beyond normal working hours, times usually reserved for their wider life stakeholders, such as children (Stewart et al., 2024). In Cyprus, early-career researchers were expected to be constantly available to cover for permanent staff, creating a severe work-life imbalance (Meletiadou, 2024). Similarly, a UK study by Alderson et al. (2022) found that 48% early-career researchers in geomorphology and earth/environmental science identified poor work-life balance as one of the most negative aspects of precarious employment.

Evidence was also found of uneven gendered realities in precarious academic work: while some men could manage both roles, women with children often found that academic demands made a sustainable work-life balance impossible, pushing many out of the field (Bozzon et al., 2017b). Overall, precarious academic work steadily erodes boundaries between work and life, harming well-being and personal life.

3.2.10 Heavy Workload (n=13)

Research shows that precariously employed academics consistently face demanding workloads. Alderson et al. (2022) found that 40% of early-career researchers in UK universities identified a heavy workload and the need to work extra hours as among the least desirable aspects of working in academia. The absence of fixed schedules often results in very long working hours (Bozzon et al., 2017a; Solomon & Du Plessis, 2023b), and many report substantial teaching responsibilities (Kınıkoğlu & Can, 2021; Kouritzin et al., 2023; Myers, 2022; Stewart et al., 2021; Stringer et al., 2018), leaving limited time for academic publishing. Some even take on additional labour in hopes of securing a permanent position (Stewart et al., 2024).

Others describe work intensification, with work carried out at an increasingly intense pace (Bozzon et al., 2017b), and the need to work continuously throughout the day (Dordoni, 2025), doing more work than they are paid for (Mason & Megoran, 2021), and experiencing a normalisation of working outside contracted hours (Menard, 2025). Overall, these studies show that precarious academic work is marked by long hours and consistently heavy workloads.

3.2.11 Maternity Penalty (n=6)

Although maternity-protection frameworks aim to safeguard pregnancy and childbirth, academic mothers in precarious roles continue to experience substantial penalties. Beck's (2025) study on

eight non-tenure-track mothers in a large US research university reported that these mothers do not have access to maternity leave, while Bozzon et al. (2017b) noted that motherhood is still perceived as a problematic event in Italian academia. Nichols (2023) documented the disadvantages experienced by academic mothers during the postpartum period in Canada. Similarly, research by O'Keefe and Courtois (2019) in Ireland and Menard (2025) in the UK found that pregnancy and parenthood act as barriers to securing stable employment or career progression. Further, Hlatshwayo (2025) showed that career breaks related to childbirth in South Africa negatively affect women academics' entry into academia and limit their subsequent career progression. A significant post-childbirth decline in women's research output compared with men (Hlatshwayo, 2024) has also been described in the body of scholarship. Overall, the evidence highlights enduring obstacles for pregnant or new mothers in academia.

3.2.12 Job Insecurity (n=12)

Job insecurity, especially the persistent fear of losing one's current position, emerged as a major concern across the studies. A study by Alderson et al. (2022) found that 63% of early-career researchers in the UK identified short-term contracts and lack of job security as the worst aspect of academic work. Precariously employed academics described job insecurity as disorienting and a constant struggle for survival (Arday, 2022), marked by little control over employment arrangements, uncertainty, and an inability to make long-term plans (Bone, 2021). Many are worried about contract renewals (Hlatshwayo, 2024; Hlatshwayo, 2025), being removed from future teaching rosters (Stewart et al., 2021), and having to repeatedly reapply for jobs (Nichols, 2023). Others lived in fear due to career insecurity (Stewart et al., 2024), and faced continuous job searching (Stringer et al., 2018).

Job insecurity also disrupted career continuity and undermined research performance among early-career researchers, with SSH scholars identifying insecurity as their main source of stress (Bozzon

et al., 2017a). Precariously employed academics struggled to plan ahead because employment conditions changed each year based on funding and HR decisions (Mason & Megoran, 2021). This insecurity had significant mental health impacts, with one-third of participants reporting that it limited their ability to make major life decisions (Menard, 2025). Overall, these studies show that ongoing job insecurity is a persistent and damaging feature of precarious academic work.

3.2.13 Job Assignments (n=3)

Precariously employed academics frequently encounter job assignments that place them at a disadvantage. Their responsibilities are frequently ill-defined, with broad and open-ended categories such as “other duties as assigned,” which increase their vulnerability to exploitation through unpaid or invisible labour (Kouritzin et al., 2023). There have also been reports of precariously employed academics being required to contribute to other scholars’ grant applications without formal recognition or compensation (Mason & Megoran, 2021). These heavy teaching demands and expansive, undefined duties significantly limit their capacity to engage in research and publish their work (Nichols, 2023). Overall, such practices limit both their professional autonomy and their long-term career prospects.

3.2.14 Advancement (n=11)

Research consistently shows limited career advancement for precariously employed academics. The assumption that postdoctoral training leads to permanent academic employment is no longer supported (Hlatshwayo, 2024). Contingent faculty, particularly Black women, are often treated as replaceable, with institutions showing little commitment to their progression (Porter et al., 2020). Temporary contracts restrict access to promotion (Solomon & Du Plessis, 2023b) and often require repeated applications at each stage of the postdoctoral pathway (Menard, 2025), reinforcing structural instability.

Comparative research further highlights limited career progression, with Italian universities demonstrating weaker career mobility than other countries and the private sector (Bozzon et al., 2017b). Professional development for casual staff is frequently limited or absent (Khosa et al., 2025; Mason & Megoran, 2021), contributing to stagnation as expertise is overlooked (Daraz et al., 2025). Meletiadou (2024) found that opportunities for advancement remain particularly restricted for women in Cyprus compared to the UK, while in the UK, Black and working-class academics are more likely to remain on insecure contracts and to be overlooked for permanent roles in favour of White candidates perceived as a better institutional fit (Myers, 2022). Collectively, these studies demonstrate persistent structural barriers to career progression for precariously employed academics.

3.2.15 Training and Opportunities (n= 4)

Relatively few studies have examined training opportunities for precariously employed academics. However, existing research consistently points to limited institutional investment in their training and professional development (Arday, 2022). Similarly, Khosa et al.'s (2025) study across four Australian universities found that professional development opportunities for casual staff were limited, restricting their ability to develop skills and meet their need for competence. Other studies report that university training initiatives often exclude temporarily employed academics (Morris & Rowell, 2024; Solomon & Du Plessis, 2023b). Overall, the literature indicates that access to training and professional development remains significantly limited for precariously employed academics.

3.2.16 Job Prospects (n=6)

Research indicates that precariously employed academics face limited job prospects or future opportunities, particularly in terms of their likelihood of securing ongoing work or a permanent position within universities. Strong performance does not guarantee continued teaching allocations

(Khosa et al., 2025). Teaching-only adjuncts are typically ranked lowest when considered for tenure-track positions (Kınıkoğlu & Can, 2025), and many overestimate their chances of securing permanent academic employment (Menard, 2025).

Further, many felt pressured to pursue ongoing professional development to improve future prospects (Varea et al., 2021). Given these restricted prospects, a substantial number are contemplating leaving academia altogether (Morris, 2025). In Italy, a study found that poor job prospects in academia pushed researchers to seek secure work in the private sector or move abroad (Bozzon et al., 2017b). Overall, the evidence shows that precariously employed academics face significantly constrained job prospects.

3.2.17 Absence /Lack of Employment Benefits (n=8)

Many studies indicate that precariously employed academics may lack access to standard employment benefits. Research suggests that they are often excluded from sick leave, maternity leave and pay, pension contributions, unemployment benefits, health insurance or medical aid, bonuses, and/or general leave entitlements (Arday, 2022; Bozzon et al., 2017b; Hlatshwayo, 2024; Khosa et al., 2025; O'Keefe & Courtois, 2019; Solomon & Du Plessis, 2023b; Stewart et al., 2024). This exclusion deepens their disadvantage and further marginalises them within academic institutions.

3.2.18 Limited Employment Protection (n=9)

Research in this field indicates that precariously employed academics may experience limited employment protection. O'Keefe and Courtois (2019) suggest that these academics experience weaker access in practice to unfair dismissal protection. The researchers also found that despite statutory minimum wage and equal pay provisions, the insecure nature of these academics' employment may limit the enforcement of such rights.

Many studies note that although some precariously employed academics may join unions, their rights remain limited because they lack strong union protection, and in many cases, unions are unable to do much for them (Daniels et al., 2024; Dordoni, 2025; Kouritzin et al., 2023; Morris & Rowell, 2024; Myers, 2022; Rao et al., 2021; Stringer et al., 2018). While unions may advocate for better wages and working conditions, they cannot on their own bring about the deeper structural changes needed to address the growing problem of precarity (Stewart et al., 2024). As a result, precariously employed academics remain highly vulnerable within their employment conditions.

3.2.19 Emotional and Mental Well-Being (n=22)

A majority of the articles reviewed reported on the poor mental and emotional well-being of precariously employed academics, indicating that this is a serious issue. The emotional states described include hopelessness and despair (Daraz et al., 2025); damaged self-worth, frustration, and humiliation (Kouritzin et al., 2023); anxiety and depression (Arday, 2022); vulnerability and exposure to risk (Morris, 2025); fear, feeling threatened, being monitored, and emotional pressure (O'Keefe & Courtois, 2019); emotional distress, shock, and confusion (Schofield, 2022); hurt and demoralisation (Smele et al., 2021); feelings of inferiority (Stringer et al., 2018); disrespect (Willson et al., 2024); and the sense of being trapped (Bone, 2021). Many sought support through counsellors, therapists, and/or the use of antidepressant medication (Nichols, 2023). Overall, the findings show just how deeply precarious work harms academics' emotional well-being.

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CHAPTER FOUR: DISCUSSION

This chapter analyses and synthesises the findings of the systematic literature review in relation to the research question. Drawing on the 19 basic themes identified in Chapter Three, the findings are analysed through the lens of internationally recognised principles that underpin fair treatment in employment and the avoidance of discrimination. Additionally, as this master's dissertation is conducted within a New Zealand university, the predominantly international literature is interpreted through the lens of the New Zealand employment context, which is shaped by legislation grounded in internationally recognised principles of fair work and equality. Further, the chapter discusses emerging insights that arose during the review process.

The overall objective of this research is to synthesise and examine what prior studies have found about the experiences of academics in universities resulting from precarious employment, and to explore how those experiences relate to recognised forms of workplace discrimination. The research question guiding this review is:

What forms of discrimination are experienced by academic staff in precarious employment situations in universities?

Based on the review findings, academic staff in precarious employment situations within universities experience two main forms of discrimination:

1. Identity-based discrimination - related to prohibited grounds recognised in the International Labour Organisation Convention 111 and New Zealand legislation (Employment Relations Act 2000 and Human Rights Act 1993).

2. Employment-related discrimination - reflecting issues similar to those outlined under Principle 6 of the UN Global Compact, the World Health Organisation, and the New Zealand Health and Safety at Work Act, 2015.

These forms of discrimination are experienced to varying degrees and are influenced by several factors, as discussed in the following section.

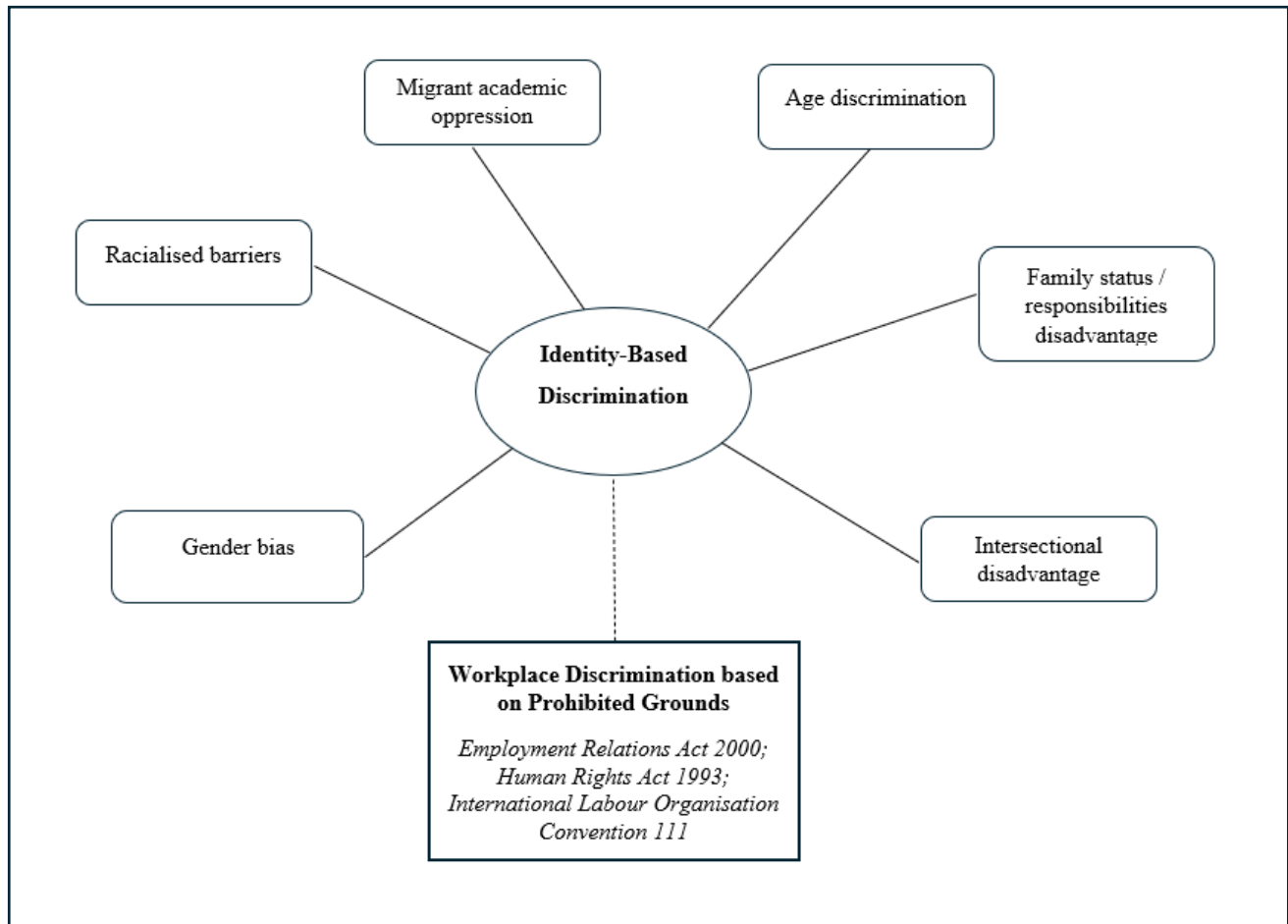
4.1 Identity-Based Discrimination

The review identified six forms of identity-based discrimination experienced by precariously employed academics that are related to prohibited grounds or protected characteristics. Gender bias was the most frequently examined, with 20 studies addressing it either as the central focus or as a secondary finding. This was followed by research on disadvantages linked to family status or family responsibilities (n=10), intersectional disadvantages (n=8), racialised barriers (n=7), migrant oppression (n=4), and age-related barriers (n=4).

Because these six basic themes relate directly to academics' identities, they were grouped under the organising theme of identity-based discrimination (See Figure 5). Following Attride-Stirling's (2001) thematic network approach, this organising theme contributes to the global theme of workplace discrimination based on prohibited grounds. This categorisation aligns with the Employment Relations Act 2000 and the Human Rights Act 1993, both of which treat workplace discrimination on prohibited grounds as unlawful (Employment New Zealand, 2025). The Human Rights Act 1993 is New Zealand's primary anti-discrimination law, making discrimination unlawful on 13 prohibited grounds which apply across key areas of public life, including employment and education (Human Rights Act 1993; Ministry of Justice, n.d.). The Employment Relations Act 2000 addresses discrimination within employment relationships and adopts the same 13 prohibited grounds of discrimination as those set out in the Human Rights Act 1993 (Employment New Zealand, 2025; Employment Relations Act 2000).

Figure 5

Thematic Network of Identity-Based Discrimination Themes



* Dotted line indicates identity-based discrimination may not always meet the legal definition of discrimination on prohibited grounds

Identity-based discrimination also aligns with International Labour Organisation Convention No. 111 on Discrimination in Employment and Occupation, which defines discrimination, lists prohibited grounds such as race, colour, sex, etc. and requires member states to eliminate it (Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention No.111, 1958) . Therefore, the forms of discrimination experienced by precariously employed academics on the basis of protected identities, as identified in the reviewed literature and presented thematically in this study, may be considered unlawful under these frameworks.

Unlawful discrimination occurs when a person is treated differently and less fairly because of characteristics such as race, sex, age, religion, or another prohibited ground, resulting in unequal terms of employment, working conditions, fringe benefits, or opportunities for training, promotion, or transfer. In New Zealand, establishing unlawful discrimination requires comparison with others who have similar qualifications, experience, or skills, and who are employed in the same or substantially similar circumstances (Employment New Zealand, 2025).

Many precariously employed academics, particularly early-career academics, often lack equivalent qualifications, experience, and/or employment conditions relative to permanent staff. As a result, although the discrimination they experience is significant, it may not meet the legal threshold for being deemed unlawful. Experiences of discrimination are highly individual, and only a court or tribunal can finally determine whether unlawful discrimination has occurred. In practice, very few cases progress that far because discrimination is often subtle, direct evidence is rare, and precariously employed academics may face job insecurity, weak protections, and institutional explanations for unfavourable treatment that are difficult to disprove (Gilhooley, 2015; Hora, 2001; Ward & Hall, 2022).

Further, the review findings indicate that precariously employed academics frequently normalise or accept their circumstances (Bozzon et al., 2017a; Dordoni, 2025; Hlatshwayo, 2024; Menard, 2025) a pattern that aligns with conceptualisations of precarious academic work as a form of “hope labour”. Hope labour is defined as “un- or under-compensated work carried out in the present, often for experience or exposure, in the hope that future employment opportunities may follow” (Kuehn & Corrigan, 2013, p. 9). Sustained by expectations of future stability, many remain caught in a state of cruel optimism (Bone, 2021; Hlatshwayo, 2024; Menard, 2025; Solomon & Du Plessis, 2023b; Steinþórsdóttir et al., 2019), believing that their continued endurance will eventually lead to improved employment outcomes. Notably, none of the reviewed studies reported cases progressing

to a personal grievance or court action, suggesting that hope-based attachment to the academic career path may inhibit formal challenge and contribute to the internalisation of exploitative conditions. This is reinforced by power imbalances within academia, where hierarchical structures (shaped by departmental politics, scholarly prestige, and institutional traditions) can conceal discrimination behind seemingly neutral standards such as “collegiality,” “fit,” or “excellence” (Nisar, 2025). Together, these dynamics reflect a troubling reality that while the experiences of precariously employed academics mirror forms of discrimination prohibited by law, they persist in the system under such conditions with little formal challenge.

4.2 Employment-Related Discrimination

Several of the basic themes also point to discrimination occurring across a wide range of work-related activities and embedded within the terms and conditions of employment. This form of discrimination aligns with internationally recognised labour standards, particularly Principle 6 of the UN Global Compact, which emphasises the elimination of discrimination in employment and occupation (United Nations Global Compact, n.d.- b). Principle 6 requires employers to identify, prevent, and eliminate discrimination in all work-related decisions, including hiring, pay, promotions, training, job assignments, working conditions, and job security - thereby encompassing every stage of employment from recruitment through to workplace health and safety (United Nations Global Compact, n.d.- b).

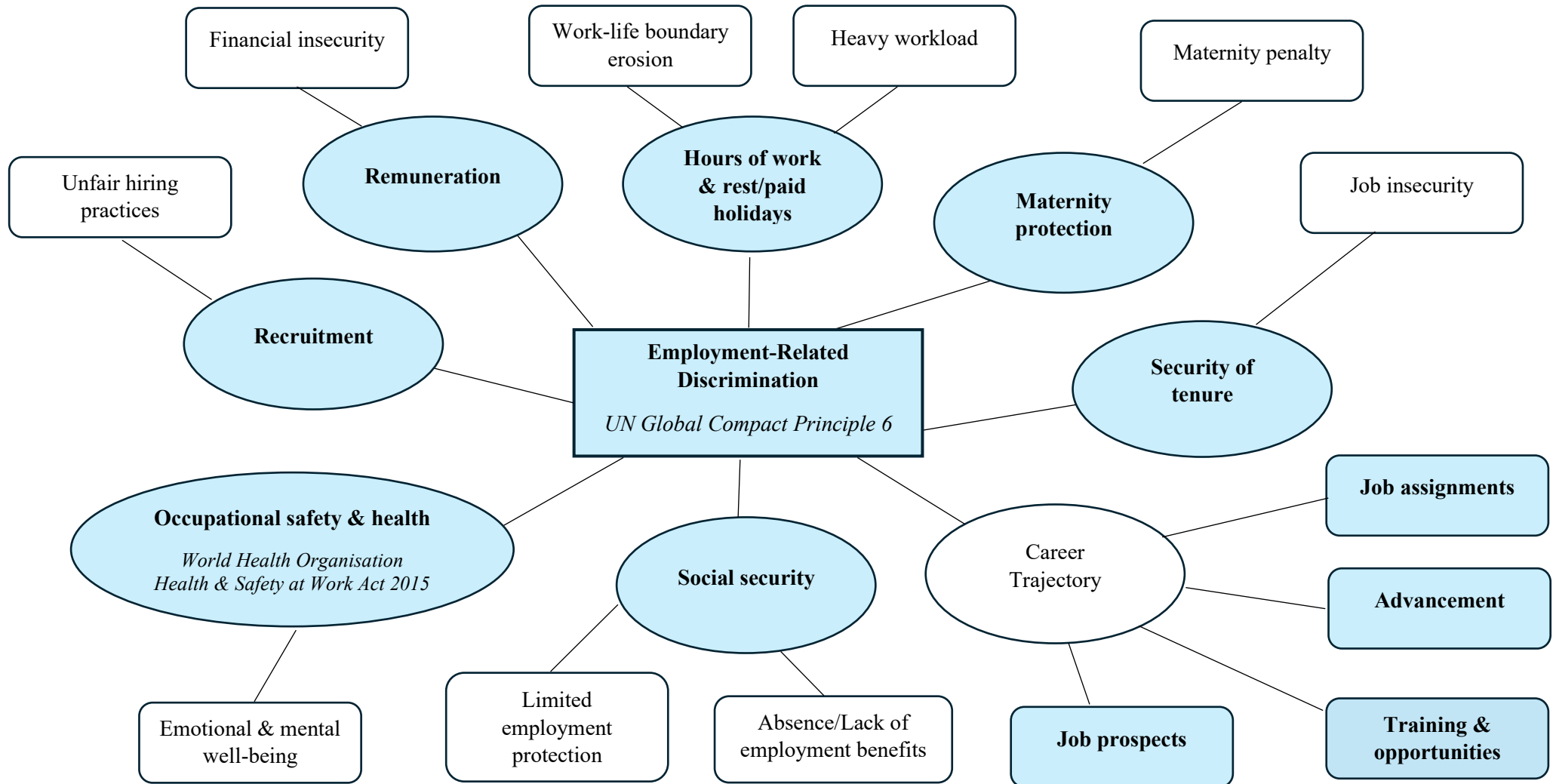
In the thematic network diagram (Figure 6), the 13 basic themes (shown as rounded rectangles) on the outer layer were derived from inductively generated codes that were subsequently grouped using both inductive and deductive approaches. These basic themes were then organised into higher-order organising themes (represented by oval shapes), which collectively contribute to the global theme of employment-related discrimination. The blue shapes highlight those themes that correspond directly to the areas specified in Principle 6 (United Nations Global Compact, n.d.-b),

demonstrating a clear overlap between the review findings and recognised international labour standards. The findings across the reviewed studies provide consistent evidence of discriminatory practices within these areas. For example, some studies identified inequalities relating to the tasks, duties, or roles precariously employed academics are assigned (job assignments). Others pertained to whether they have fair opportunities to move up (advancement), while some highlighted inequalities in access to learning and development (training and opportunities). Taken together, this thematic network demonstrates that precariously employed academics encounter forms of discrimination at multiple points across the employment lifecycle, indicating that they are structurally embedded rather than isolated incidents. These patterns reflect Acker's (2006) concept of inequality regimes, showing how institutionalised practices systematically produce and sustain the inequalities experienced by precariously employed academics.

The International Labour Organisation defines discrimination in employment and occupation as the unequal or less favourable treatment of individuals based on factors unrelated to merit or job requirements (International Labour Organisation, 2024). Consistent with this, the findings show that long-term researchers, adjunct professors and sessional staff routinely perform core academic duties such as teaching foundational subjects, assessment design and marking, and research that require comparable levels of skill, responsibility, and workload to those of permanently employed academics (De Angelis & Grüning, 2020; Menard, 2025; O'Keefe & Courtois, 2019). Despite this equivalence, they do not receive comparable employment conditions, indicating unequal treatment that is not based on merit or job requirements. This group, described as the pro-sessional, represents a growing segment of highly skilled, competent and experienced precariously employed academics who undertake complex, faculty-critical work that is as essential as that undertaken by permanently employed academics, yet without access to equivalent salary levels, job security, or employment benefits (Heffernan & Smithers, 2026).

Figure 6

Thematic Network of Employment Related Discrimination Themes



Further, unhealthy work environments, featuring discrimination and inequality, excessive workloads, low job control, and/or job insecurity, can affect mental health in adverse ways (World Health Organization, 2024). Mental health is recognised as an important part of occupational health and safety by major bodies such as the World Health Organisation (WHO) and WorkSafe New Zealand. According to the Health and Safety at Work Act 2015 (HSWA), New Zealand businesses must provide and maintain a work environment that is free from risks to safety and health, including mental health (WorkSafe NZ, 2023). If precariously employed academics face increased stress, anxiety, or burnout due to their contract status and universities fail to protect them, this may constitute grounds for claiming discrimination in occupational health and safety protection.

Discrimination can operate indirectly when workplace rules or practices that are presented as equal for all are, in practice, shaped by unconscious bias and dominant norms, leading to the exclusion or disadvantage of certain groups despite no overt intent to discriminate (United Nations Global Compact, n.d.-b). Discrimination occurring in employment conditions and experiences can be more difficult to detect and requires persistent effort to overcome (United Nations Global Compact, n.d.-b). This presents a significant challenge for precariously employed academics, as establishing that their experiences amount to employment-related discrimination can be difficult.

4.3 Additional Insights from the Systematic Literature Review

The following sections discuss key emerging insights requiring further attention, as found from the review of the 35 articles, which include institutional practices that reinforce inequality, organisational dehumanisation, and the varying degrees of discrimination experienced by precariously employed academics. These insights are examined in greater depth below.

4.3.1 Institutional Practices Reinforcing Inequalities

While the findings show that some universities fall short in addressing discrimination across different stages of employment, they also reveal an additional insight in that universities may engage in subtle institutional practices that reinforce the inequalities experienced by precariously employed academics; practices that are not captured by Principle 6 of the UN Global Compact.

Such practices include a lack of duty of care, the ease with which precariously employed academics can be replaced (Arday, 2022), and the use of ambiguous employment contracts (Bozzon et al., 2017a), and the failure to formalise temporary roles or provide adequate induction (Daniels et al., 2024). Additional studies identify the absence of formal support and avenues for raising concerns (Daraz et al., 2025), unclear organisational rules that heighten stress and uncertainty (Dordoni, 2025), and limited access to support and mentoring (Hlatshwayo, 2025). Broader patterns of inequalities also emerge, such as restricted access to teaching resources and essential equipment (Nichols, 2023; Stewart et al., 2021), mixed messages about role expectations (Porter et al., 2020), and unequal access to key information that places additional cognitive and administrative burdens on contract staff (Willson et al., 2024).

Viewed through Acker's (2006) concept of inequality regimes, these practices can be understood as routine and normalised organisational processes through which inequality is systematically produced and sustained. Rather than being the result of individual managerial decisions, the findings suggest that precarity is built into everyday institutional practices, policies, and organisational cultures. These structures make unequal treatment of precariously employed academics seem normal and often go unnoticed. Inequality regimes, therefore, help explain how universities continue to reproduce unequal working conditions while appearing fair and neutral.

The systematic literature review conducted for this study brings these findings together to demonstrate that such institutional practices systematically disadvantage precariously employed academics in ways that fall outside formal definitions of employment-related discrimination. This highlights a disconnect between the discrimination frameworks used in international principles and legislation, and the lived realities of precariously employed academics whose experiences are shaped by inequalities that are not acknowledged in existing protections.

4.3.2 Organisational Dehumanisation

Another key insight emerging from this review is the close intersection between experiences of workplace discrimination, precarious employment, and organisational dehumanisation. From an intersectional perspective (Crenshaw, 1991), these experiences should not be seen as isolated. Instead, they overlap and interact with one another in ways that intensify the harm experienced by precariously employed academics. In this context, precarious employment combines with discriminatory organisational practices to increase experiences of dehumanisation, particularly for academics who are affected by multiple forms of disadvantage.

Organisational dehumanisation refers to “the experience of an employee who feels objectified by his or her organization, denied personal subjectivity, and made to feel like a tool or instrument for the organization’s ends” (Bell & Khoury, 2011, p. 168). The systematic literature review found that the contributing factors and consequences of discrimination experienced by precariously employed academics closely mirror those identified in the organisational dehumanisation literature. Research on organisational dehumanisation highlights several key contributing factors, including reduced organisational support, abusive supervision that undermines self-esteem, poor physical work environment, limited job autonomy, professional isolation that fosters a diminished sense of belonging, and inadequate collegial support (Baldissarri & Fourie, 2023; Lagios et al., 2023; Nguyen et al., 2021). These factors closely correspond with documented drivers of discrimination

embedded within university practices that reproduce inequality while remaining largely unaddressed by existing protection frameworks such as the UN Global Compact. Such patterns are identified across multiple studies in the systematic literature review on precariously employed academics (for example: Nichols, 2023; O'Keefe & Courtois, 2019; Stringer et al., 2018). Thus, this review extends existing understanding by showing that precarity not only leads to perceived discrimination but also produces working conditions in which academics experience dehumanisation.

Likewise, the consequences identified in the systematic literature review of discrimination affecting precariously employed academics closely parallel those reported in the organisational dehumanisation literature. Across both bodies of work, comparable outcomes are reported, including psychological strain, emotional exhaustion, burnout, stress, heightened negative emotions, and reduced self-esteem (Baldissarri & Fourie, 2023; Daraz et al., 2025; Schofield, 2022; Smele et al., 2021). These shared consequences suggest that the discriminatory conditions associated with precarious academic employment, particularly those affecting emotional and mental well-being, closely reflect processes of organisational dehumanisation.

Furthermore, organisational dehumanisation literature reported that women are disproportionately affected, experiencing higher levels of dehumanisation than men (Baldissarri & Fourie, 2023). This pattern closely aligns with gender-based discrimination identified in the experiences of precariously employed academics across the studies (De Angelis & Grüning, 2020; Kınıkoğlu & Can, 2025; Morris, 2025), illustrating how gender and job precarity intersect to intensify experiences of discrimination. These parallels reinforce the value of an intersectional framework for understanding how discrimination and dehumanisation are reproduced in universities among precariously employed academics.

These findings suggest that while organisational dehumanisation and discrimination arising from precarious employment are different concepts, they intersect and reinforce one another within structurally unequal academic environments. As such, precarious employment can be understood not only as a labour market condition but also as an ethical and institutional issue shaped by intersecting systems of both inequality and dehumanising organisational practices.

However, only three studies within the systematic literature review explicitly addressed dehumanisation in relation to precarity. Mason and Megoran (2021) conceptualised precarity through processes of dehumanisation and humanisation, drawing on African American theology and anthropology; however, their framework is context-specific, highlighting the need for broader and more universally applicable theoretical approaches. Studies from Arday (2022) and Solomon and Du Plessis (2023b) briefly acknowledged the dehumanising aspects of precarious employment without substantively theorising the relationship. Many other studies from the review implicitly described dehumanising experiences without explicitly using the term. For example, Hlatshwayo (2024) described anxiety, stress, and feeling like “workhorses” metaphorically useful for covering teaching operations and enhancing university rankings despite lacking permanent employment security. Kouritzin et al. (2023) highlighted the absence of mentorship, professional community, and a culture of sharing, reflecting a lack of support. Morris (2025) documented profound isolation and a sense of non-belonging, reflecting a lack of care and responsibility, while Daraz et al. (2025) described compliance being demanded without consultation or voice. Collectively, these experiences reflect core elements of organisational dehumanisation, even where dehumanisation is not explicitly named.

International frameworks recognise dignity, non-discrimination, and equal treatment as fundamental human rights (Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948), while the International Labour Organisation affirms that labour rights are human rights, including the right to fair working

conditions, security, and protection from discrimination (Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention No. 111, 1958; International Labour Organisation, 2024). Future qualitative research could more directly examine the lived experiences of dehumanisation among precariously employed academics and draw on international labour and human rights frameworks to assess whether such employment arrangements constitute violations of fundamental human and labour rights.

4.3.3 Varying Degrees of Discrimination

A further important insight that emerged from the systematic literature review is that the degree of precarity in academic employment differs across contexts, resulting in varying experiences of discrimination and making certain groups more vulnerable. As discussed earlier, personal characteristics such as gender or race can heighten vulnerability and intensify experiences of discrimination. However, the review highlights that these variations are also influenced by a wider range of contextual factors beyond individual characteristics. These factors include research versus teaching roles, student evaluations of teaching, the COVID-19 pandemic, disciplinary differences (STEM versus SSH), social capital, material and structural living conditions, and country-level context. The personal characteristics often intersect with these factors, increasing the severity of discriminatory experiences for the affected academics. The section below explores these variations in greater detail.

4.3.3.1 Research vs Teaching Roles

A key pattern identified in the review was that precarity and experiences of discrimination in academia vary depending on one's labour-related conditions. Findings from the review show that precariously employed academics whose work centres on teaching and pastoral care occupy the lower end of the institutional hierarchy, regarded as almost illegitimate, and placed at the bottom when candidates were considered for tenure-track roles (Kınıkoğlu & Can, 2025; Morris & Rowell,

2024). The evidence shows that teaching activity is often valued less than research. In contrast, those with precarious research roles were perceived to be higher on the hierarchy, as research has the potential to also attract significant income for universities (Kınıkoğlu & Can, 2021; Morris & Rowell, 2024). This suggests that research-focused and teaching-focused academics may experience different degrees of precarity and perceived discrimination.

From the perspective of Labour Market Segmentation Theory (Doeringer & Piore, 1971), this divide reflects a structural segmentation within academic labour markets, where research-focused roles align more closely with a primary labour market segment associated with higher status, greater security, and clearer progression pathways. In contrast, teaching-only and pastoral-care-focused roles are concentrated within a secondary labour market segment, characterised by reduced institutional recognition and heightened precarity.

This segmentation is produced through university practices and the wider economic conditions which shape inequalities in the labour market, for example, via selective access to career and training opportunities, generating structural barriers that limit some groups' ability to move into primary sector roles (Doeringer & Piore, 1971; Grimshaw et al., 2017). This results in unequal employment conditions and contributes to the normalisation of differential treatment between academic roles within universities.

4.3.3.2 Student Evaluations of Teaching (SETs)

The review revealed consistent evidence of how SETs influence contract renewal, thereby shaping the degree of precarity experienced by precariously employed academics, while also contributing to perceptions of discriminatory evaluations. The findings further indicate that the use of SETs disproportionately disadvantages precariously employed women and people of colour, who consequently report higher levels of perceived discrimination.

Collectively, the studies suggest that SETs function as a mechanism of labour control, through which academics are judged on personal characteristics, experience increased pressure to work more efficiently, manage their interactions with students, make strategic pedagogical decisions, and, in some cases, modify their accents (Porter et al., 2020; Smele et al., 2021; Stewart et al., 2024). This occurs because negative evaluations continue to carry significant weight and can seriously affect academic careers, particularly for precariously employed academics (Kouritzin et al., 2023; Morris & Rowell, 2024; Smele et al., 2021). Such conditions may contribute to heightened experiences of discrimination, particularly among already disadvantaged women and people of colour. While this insight is derived from the synthesis of existing studies rather than primary data, the consistency of findings across the reviewed literature strengthens the credibility of this interpretation.

4.3.3.3 COVID-19 Pandemic

Another consistent pattern emerging from the literature is that the COVID-19 pandemic intensified the vulnerabilities experienced by precariously employed academics (Dordoni, 2025; Hlatshwayo, 2024; Khosa et al., 2025; Kınikoğlu & Can, 2021; Kouritzin et al., 2023; Stewart et al., 2024; Stewart et al., 2021). The findings indicate that during the pandemic, exploitation increased through layoffs, short-notice contracts, and heightened expectations to support increased student needs across multiple delivery modes and often without corresponding job security or institutional support (Kouritzin et al., 2023).

At the same time, the divide between research and teaching work widened with women, particularly those in teaching-focused positions and precarious roles, disproportionately affected (Kınikoğlu & Can, 2021). These conditions reflect and intensify the identity-based and employment-related discrimination discussed earlier in the chapter, as job assignments and workload expectations were unevenly distributed along gendered lines during the pandemic.

Further, experiences of precarity and discrimination during lockdown varied significantly according to parental status and domestic responsibilities. A notable finding was that academic mothers frequently reported feeling “overwhelmed” by caregiving and domestic labour and “squeezed” between these responsibilities, remote research expectations, and the demands of online teaching, while in contrast, a childless female researcher described the same period as relatively “serene” (Dordoni, 2025). This highlights the uneven impact of pandemic conditions even among women. COVID-19 also exacerbated existing gender inequalities, with women, including those in precarious academic employment, experiencing greater job loss and intensified vulnerability compared to men (Stewart et al., 2021).

Taken together, this body of evidence demonstrates that the pandemic intensified academic precarity in multiple and intersecting ways, disproportionately affecting certain groups and deepening existing experiences of discrimination.

4.3.3.4 STEM vs SSH

Viewed collectively, the literature reveals a previously obscured pattern, showing that the degree of precarity experienced by precariously employed academics is strongly shaped by the gendered disciplinary field in which they work. University management structures tend to provide better employment and working conditions in the male-dominated STEM fields, while academics in feminised SSH fields are more likely to occupy more precarious positions (Steinþórsdóttir et al., 2019).

The review findings highlight these disparities. Researchers in STEM disciplines typically earn higher salaries, whereas SSH researchers face greater job instability, heavier workloads, and lower pay (Bozzon et al., 2017a; Dordoni, 2025; Kouritzin et al., 2023). Moreover, STEM postdoctoral fellows, who see stable private-sector opportunities as a realistic backup, may feel less pressure

from academic precarity because they can envision secure careers outside the university in higher-paid private sector jobs (Bozzon et al., 2017b; Steinþórsdóttir et al., 2019). This perception of reduced risk is further supported by Bozzon et al. (2017b), who found that early-career researchers employed on fixed-term assistant professor contracts in an Italian university did not consider themselves to be in precarious positions. Despite the formal instability of their roles, these researchers expressed confidence that they would soon secure permanent positions within their STEM departments. This confidence appears to be linked to the higher institutional value placed on STEM fields and the elevated status associated with assistant professor roles, demonstrating how precariously employed academics can experience very different levels of precarity.

In contrast, SSH researchers, whose qualifications offer far less certainty in the wider labour market, experience academic precarity more intensely, as they cannot rely on external options for stability (Bozzon et al., 2017b; Steinþórsdóttir et al., 2019). Clearly, this demonstrates labour market segmentation (Doeringer & Piore, 1971), with STEM academics occupying more secure and privileged segments, in contrast to the greater precarity experienced by SSH academics. This segmentation ultimately shapes the degree and intensity of insecurity that precariously employed academics experience across disciplinary fields.

4.3.3.5 Social Capital, Financial Safety Net, and Structural Conditions

Social capital refers to the advantages gained through social relationships, whether personal or organisational. Personal social capital arises from connections with friends, family, and acquaintances inside and outside the workplace, while intra-organisational social capital is built through relationships within and between formal and informal groups and teams in the organisation (Ben-Hador & Hopkins, 2025).

What becomes visible through this review is the close interrelationship between social capital and the intensity of discrimination experienced by precariously employed academics. Access to social capital through gatekeeper-sponsors, such as collegial support, informal relationships with supervisors and other staff, and strong departmental connections, positions some fixed-term researchers and doctoral students more advantageously (Kınıkoğlu & Can, 2025; Morris, 2025; Rao et al., 2021). The findings indicate that these relationships enable them to build professional networks and secure teaching opportunities and contract extensions, thereby mitigating the intensity of precarity in their employment. In addition, social capital in the form of partner support, particularly from partners willing to endure the uncertainty of early-career academic life and assist throughout the job-hunting process, also helps lessen the intensity of job precariousness (Kınıkoğlu & Can, 2025).

These findings suggest the presence of relational inequality in access to teaching opportunities and contract renewals, whereby some academics may be disadvantaged due to limited access to social capital shaped by factors such as race, gender, or social class (Kınıkoğlu & Can, 2025; Rao et al., 2021). Consequently, the findings indicate that identity-based discrimination may intersect with social capital, exacerbating the academic's experiences of discrimination and precarity.

In addition to social capital, the review suggests that financial safety nets also shape the degree of precarity experienced by academics. Those who treat academic work as a supplementary or casual job and/or are supported by a financially stable partner or another primary source of income tend to experience significantly less stress, in contrast to sole providers, for whom precarity is intensified (Solomon & Du Plessis, 2023b). Therefore, greater financial security may also reduce the likelihood that individuals interpret negative experiences as discriminatory.

Precarity could also be managed when early-career academics have favourable structural conditions (e.g., leading their own research as opposed to being employed in someone else's project, teaching specialised courses, or having strong institutional support), and the ability to bring funding into the university (Kınıkoğlu & Can, 2021). Further, personal confidence enhances individuals' capacity to seek out information and opportunities, making the precarious nature of their work less intense (Morris, 2025). Together, these factors demonstrate that the experience of academic precarity is uneven and shaped by social capital, financial resources, structural opportunities, and self-efficacy, which may also influence the extent to which academics perceive discrimination.

4.3.3.6 Country-Level Context

Another key insight across the studies is that precarity and experiences of discrimination among academics may vary across countries. The literature demonstrates that in countries such as Pakistan, Italy, Cyprus, and Argentina, structural and cultural factors intensify both employment insecurity and exposure to discriminatory practices. In Pakistan, for example, daily-wage academics are compensated on a per-class basis at rates insufficient to meet basic living needs, and payments are often irregular or delayed due to neglect from university administration (Daraz et al., 2025). Similarly, in Italy, early-career researchers are employed under contractual arrangements that do not fully recognise them as workers, effectively excluding them from accessing even the limited welfare and security provisions available to other professionals on temporary contracts (Bozzon et al., 2017a).

Comparative studies included in the systematic literature review further illustrate how these experiences differ across national contexts. For instance, the review indicates that female early-career academics in Cyprus experienced unfair pay, unpaid work, pervasive patriarchy, higher levels of sexual harassment, and an expectation to be available 24/7; however, after migrating to the UK, these same academics reported better work-life balance, more opportunities, and greater

financial security (Meletiadou, 2024). A similar contrast is evident in the comparison between Argentina and Australia. In Argentina, unpaid academic work is normalised within the higher education system and is often viewed as a necessary step toward career progression; however, in Australia, comparable academic work is paid, offering greater security (Varea et al., 2021). Collectively, these studies suggest that precarity in academia is a fluid, context-dependent condition, and the boundaries between acceptable struggle, precarity, and discrimination can be difficult to identify (Varea et al., 2021).

In summary, this chapter synthesised the literature on discrimination experienced by precariously employed academics, identifying two forms: identity-based discrimination and employment-related discrimination. Beyond these categories, the systematic literature review revealed how institutional practices can reinforce inequality by operating outside internationally recognised discrimination frameworks. The findings further demonstrate how employment precarity parallels organisational dehumanisation, raising questions regarding the protection of human rights within academic workplaces. The review also highlights that experiences of discrimination are not uniform but instead vary in intensity depending on a range of contextual and individual factors. Together, these findings highlight the central role of employment precarity in shaping and sustaining unequal treatment within universities.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

This concluding chapter reflects on the systematic literature review of precarious employment among academics in universities, with particular attention to workplace discrimination.

It highlights the study's key insights, outlines the theoretical, conceptual, and practical contributions, and acknowledges its limitations. The chapter concludes by identifying directions for future research.

This systematic literature review set out to examine what forms of discrimination are experienced by academics employed in precarious roles in universities, drawing on academic literature, legislative frameworks, and international labour standards. Overall, the review shows that discrimination faced by precariously employed academics occurs in multiple forms and is embedded within university employment structures and in doing so highlights several key insights:

- Precarious employment intensifies vulnerability to discrimination.
- Existing literature largely reported on subjective or perceived discrimination, based on academics' own experiences and perceptions.
- Academics reported experiences that may not meet formal legal or international definitions of discrimination, highlighting a gap between lived experiences and formal understandings of discrimination.
- Discrimination in academia is often embedded in everyday institutional practices rather than isolated incidents.
- Employment status intersects with identity-based inequalities and broader structural conditions to compound disadvantage.

These key findings are important given the growing reliance on precarious academic labour globally. By showing how discrimination is structurally embedded in employment arrangements

and university practices, the review challenges assumptions that compliance with existing legal and international frameworks is sufficient to ensure non-discrimination in universities.

The predominantly international nature of the included studies, with only one study conducted in New Zealand, limits the transferability of the findings to New Zealand universities. Although similar challenges were identified across countries, universities operate within different legislative, cultural, and institutional contexts. In New Zealand, factors such as employment legislation, health and safety requirements, equity commitments, and obligations under Te Tiriti o Waitangi may influence how these issues are experienced and addressed (Employment New Zealand, 2026; Ministry of Justice, n.d.; Tertiary Education Commission, 2025). Therefore, the findings should be interpreted with consideration of these contextual differences.

5.1 Contributions

This systematic literature review contributes to the understanding of legislative and international labour frameworks by critically examining how these standards align with the lived experiences of precariously employed academics. Drawing on New Zealand employment and anti-discrimination legislation alongside international frameworks such as the International Labour Organisation conventions and UN Global Compact principles, the review highlights a significant disconnect between formal protections and institutional practices within universities.

This study demonstrates that while existing frameworks focus on explicit and legally definable forms of discrimination, many of the inequalities experienced by precariously employed academics arise from implicit, routine organisational practices that fall outside formal definitions of discrimination. By synthesising evidence across the literature, this review exposes the limitations of current regulatory frameworks in addressing employment insecurity, institutional dehumanisation, and subtle yet systematic forms of disadvantage in universities.

This systematic literature review also makes a theoretical contribution by advancing understanding of precarious academic employment through a multi-level lens. While the analysis primarily drew on legislative and international labour frameworks, the findings contribute to and are consistent with Labour Market Segmentation Theory (Doeringer & Piore, 1971), Acker's (2006) Theory of Inequality Regimes, and Crenshaw's (1991) Intersectionality Theory. Together, these perspectives help explain how discrimination is structurally produced, institutionally maintained, and differentially experienced by precariously employed academics.

Lastly, the practical contributions of this research are significant. The findings can inform university policies and decision-makers by providing evidence-based insights that support more effective institutional practices, including equitable workload allocation, transparent recruitment and contract renewal processes, effective mechanisms for recognising and addressing discrimination, and better support structures for precariously employed academics. In addition, the research offers practical guidance for supervisors and managers by highlighting the importance of recognising subtle and systemic forms of discrimination, responding appropriately to concerns, and adopting more equitable and inclusive management practices.

Beyond the university context, the findings may also contribute to broader discussions at a national level by informing national policy and decision-makers, supporting the development of policies that are responsive to real-world educational and workplace needs.

5.2 Limitations

This systematic literature review has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, although a consistent conceptual search string was developed and systematically applied, the review may not capture all relevant journals because the same Boolean search string could not be applied

unchanged across the two databases used (Scopus and Business Source Complete). In Scopus, the search was limited to titles, abstracts, and keywords using the TITLE-ABS-KEY field, while in Business Source Complete, the search was conducted across all fields, reflecting differences in database structure and search syntax. Although the same search concepts were used in both databases, differences in database search functions mean that some relevant studies may have been missed (Gusenbauer & Haddaway, 2020).

Second, only two academic databases (Scopus and Business Source Complete) were used due to time constraints and the study being conducted by a sole researcher. Other databases, such as JSTOR, may contain additional relevant literature that was not included in this review. For example, a brief exploratory search in JSTOR using a similar search string returned over 10,000 results, including relevant articles that met the inclusion/exclusion criteria, such as Gosine et al. (2021) and Sabo et al. (2023), which were not captured through the searches conducted in Scopus and Business Source Complete.

Third, the search strategy did not include an exhaustive range of term variations related to discrimination, which may have led to the exclusion of some relevant studies. To maintain manageability, the search string focused on commonly used terminology. As a result, some articles that addressed discrimination using less conventional language, such as “presenteeism” (Hadjisolomou et al., 2022), “unfair” and “negative” (Solomon & Du Plessis, 2024), or concepts such as “lack of recognition” and “destructive practices” (Dodo-Balu, 2022) were not retrieved through the initial search but were identified through broader reading. Although these studies met the inclusion criteria following full-text review, they were not captured by the primary search string.

In addition, the review focused on the most commonly examined forms of discrimination, such as gender, race, and migrant status. Due to time limitations, other forms of discrimination, including

sexual orientation and ableism, were less explored and may therefore be underrepresented. Finally, limitations were also present in the data analysis process. Due to time constraints, coding was conducted by a single researcher and could not be repeated or reviewed by a second coder, which may affect the robustness of theme development.

5.3 Future Research

Future research should address several gaps identified in this review. First, studies could expand the scope of analysis to include a wider range of discrimination forms, such as sexual orientation and ableism, which were underrepresented in this review due to time and scope constraints. Second, future research could draw on a broader range of academic databases and include grey literature to capture a more comprehensive body of evidence. Third, future research may benefit from exploring the lived experiences of dehumanisation among precariously employed academics at a variety of ages and stages, as this perspective may provide deeper insight into how discrimination is experienced at an individual level. Fourth, New Zealand- specific research is needed to better understand how discrimination associated with precarious academic employment manifests within New Zealand universities. Finally, while this review identified variation in the forms and experiences of discrimination across academic roles, disciplines, and national contexts, future research could examine these differences in greater depth.

Overall, this systematic literature review highlights the persistent and wide-ranging nature of discrimination experienced by academics in precarious roles, while highlighting the need for continued research and institutional action to address these challenges within universities.

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Appendix A

An Example of AI-Generated Output

A summary or description of the AI-generated output. (Optional: attach output in an appendix.)

Output Received:

Below are well-established theoretical frameworks that are commonly used in business, management, employment, and higher-education research, organised clearly at the micro, meso, and macro levels.

They align well with your research question on discrimination and precarious academic employment.

1. Micro level – Individual experiences of discrimination

(Focuses on how discrimination is experienced and interpreted by individuals in precarious academic roles)

Psychological Contract Theory

Author: Denise Rousseau

- Focuses on informal and unwritten expectations between employers and employees.
- Examines how perceptions of unfair treatment, exclusion, or broken expectations develop in insecure employment relationships.

Intersectionality Theory

Author: Kimberlé Crenshaw

- Examines how multiple personal characteristics (such as gender, race, ethnicity, age, or migration status) interact.
- Explains how discrimination may be experienced differently by individuals with similar employment conditions.

Labour Process Theory (individual-level focus)

Authors: Harry Braverman; Paul Thompson

- Examines power, control, autonomy, and job insecurity in everyday work.
- Helps explain how individuals experience marginalisation and limited control in precarious academic roles.

2. Meso level – Organisational / university level

(Focuses on workplace structures, institutional practices, and organisational processes)

Organisational Justice Theory

Authors: Jerald Greenberg; Jason Colquitt

- Focuses on perceptions of fairness in organisational procedures, outcomes, and interpersonal treatment.
- Can be used to analyse promotion decisions, workload allocation, and access to resources within universities.

Inequality Regimes Theory

Author: Joan Acker

- Examines how organisations produce and maintain inequality through formal and informal practices.
- Focuses on employment contracts, pay structures, promotion systems, workload distribution, and everyday organisational processes within universities.

Managerialism in Higher Education

Authors: Sharon Deem & Kevin Brehony; Cris Shore & Susan Wright

- Examines management practices such as performance measurement, monitoring, and accountability.
- Focuses on how managerial approaches shape academic work and employment conditions.

3. Macro level – Structural and system-wide context

(Focuses on wider labour market, policy, and economic conditions shaping academic work)

Labour Market Segmentation Theory

Authors: Peter Doeringer & Michael Piore

- Explains how labour markets are divided into secure and insecure segments.

- Applies to the separation between permanent and precarious academic employment across higher education systems.
-

Precarity / Precarious Employment Theory

Author: Guy Standing

- Examines insecure work as a broader social and economic condition.
 - Focuses on instability, lack of protection, and long-term insecurity in employment.
-

Neoliberalism Theory

Authors: David Harvey; Wendy Brown

- Focuses on market-driven reforms, competition, and efficiency.
- Explains changes in higher education funding, governance, and employment practices.

Appendix B

Data Extraction Table

	Author(s), Year & Country	Aim/Research Question	Methodology	Sample	Theory Used	Key Findings	Limitations
¹	Alderson et al. (2022) UK	To provide a balanced analysis of the experiences of Early-Career Researchers (ECRs) who have during their academic career classified themselves as geomorphologists, environmental scientists and/or geoscientists, focusing on the post-PhD experience.	Mixed methods using textual and graphical analysis of survey data and personal experiences.	37 ECRs in geomorphology and earth /environmental science in UK universities. 23 females, 13 males.	No theory stated.	Early-career academics experience stark levels of precarity with intense pressures of university work negatively affecting their core life pathways and opportunities. Women on precarious contracts reported feeling less prepared for insecure employment and placed greater importance on job security. Men expressed higher satisfaction with financial aspects of academic employment, contributing to ongoing gender disparities, including the leaky pipeline and fewer women in senior academic positions.	Unbalanced gender responses that may influence data- 65% of respondents identify as women.
²	Arday (2022) UK	To explore the impact of the ‘gig economy’ in higher education, with a particular focus on the impact upon staff of colour within the Academy.	Mixed methods (questionnaire & interviews); thematic analysis	18 Black, Asian and minority ethnic members of staff on precarious contracts across 10 universities; 13 females & 5 males.	Critical race theory	Three key themes emerged: systemic racism, job insecurity, and lack of progression. These themes highlight the challenges ethnic minorities face when seeking permanent roles in the sector. Women of colour are particularly affected, experiencing significant barriers to achieving career stability and advancement.	The study is limited by a narrow participant scope that restricts generalisability, limited methodological depth due to a lack of triangulation and differentiation between precarious contract types, and an incomplete intersectional analysis that underrepresents factors beyond race.

3	Beck (2025) US	To study how non-tenure-track (NTT) faculty mothers make sense of and manage their overlapping roles.	Narrative analysis integrated with portraiture, semi-structured interviews; letter writing; photo submission; observations.	8 NTT faculty mothers at a large research university.	Work/Family Border Theory	Three main themes: 1. Choosing NTT roles to prioritize motherhood and flexibility but these roles make them feel invisible and professionally stuck. 2. The added pressures of southern cultural expectations exacerbate the struggles of academic mothers. 3. Working in contingent positions brings emotional and professional costs.	Lack of racial diversity among participants highlighting the need for future research that examines how race intersects with NTT status and motherhood to shape these dynamics further.
4	Bone (2021) Australia	How do young academics experience 'cruel optimism' associated with their precarious employment?	Qualitative multi case study; semi-structured interviews; thematic analysis	Young academics under 30 years old (on fixed-term or casual academic contracts) at Monash University; 5 males & 5 females.	Cruel Optimism	Persistent insecurity and emotional strain: Precarious academics faced deep insecurity, lowered expectations, and ongoing emotional stress, often feeling trapped or considering leaving academia. Coping through optimism and fantasy: They relied on "good life fantasies" and cruel optimism - hoping for future progression despite poor working conditions - which kept them accepting ongoing precarity. Lack of institutional support: Minimal recognition or support from institutions contributed to a sense of stagnation and a broader impasse of "crisis ordinariness."	Limited by a small number of participants. Data collected over one academic year only. Lack of longitudinal data limits understanding of longer-term progression of precarious employment and "crisis ordinariness."

5	Bozzon et al. (2017a) Italy	To determine the main difficulties faced by precarious researchers at the early stages of the academic career.	Interviews	33 early-career researchers, 15 males, 18 females in 2 Italian university departments- STEM and Social Sciences & Humanities	Multiple theoretical perspectives: Sociology of work; Organisational studies; Feminist and gender studies; Sociology of inequalities	Intensified workload and gendered pressures: High work intensity, blurred boundaries, and expectations of dedication undermine work–life balance, disproportionately affecting women- especially around family formation. Structural precarity and insecurity: Unstable contracts, limited social security, unclear career prospects, and restricted access to welfare entrench precarisation among academics. Mobility and life planning constraints: Pressures for geographical mobility and the perception that having children is incompatible with academia hinder personal planning and long-term stability.	No limitations stated.
6	Bozzon et al. (2017b) Italy	To analyse the interrelation between the precarisation of the early stages of scientific careers and the (re)production of gender asymmetries in career advancement strategies, in the light of the neoliberal paradigm, which has marked the Italian university system.	Biographical interviews	20 early-career researchers who had a postdoc contract with the STEM department at a medium-sized university.	Draws on neoliberalism and new public management literature to conceptualise precarious employment, alongside gender inequality and leaky pipeline frameworks to analyse structural disadvantages faced by early-career STEM academics.	Extreme precarity in Italian academia: Predominance of poorly regulated postdoctoral grants and temporary contracts, exclusion from unemployment benefits, and delayed access to tenure. Gendered disadvantages: Women experience longer periods of insecure employment than men, face greater difficulty obtaining stable positions, and are marginalised within academic career structures. Work-life imbalance and career sacrifices: High work intensity, long hours, and constant availability force female early-career researchers to postpone or forego personal life decisions (e.g., motherhood) to maintain visibility and career progression.	No limitations stated.

7	Daniels et al. (2024) South Africa	How do new academics' experiences of precarity as a condition of coloniality inform their becoming and unbecoming, and what role does collective reflexivity play?	Autoethnography; feminist self-interview	3 new academics from the University of Cape Town (PhD students hired as contract teaching staff).	Coloniality, neoliberalism and collective reflexivity	Precarity as structural and personal: It involves both unstable academic conditions and the personal, lived experience of that instability. Impact on identity and agency: Precarity affects how academics develop a sense of self and their ability to act, sometimes supporting growth and sometimes limiting it. Particular effects for temporary staff: For precarious, temporary, or contract roles, conditions are constantly changing, creating estrangement, reinforcing colonial work norms, and undermining a coherent sense of identity.	No limitations stated.
8	Daraz et al. (2025) Pakistan	To provide a comprehensive understanding of the systemic challenges faced by daily wage teachers, focusing on the precarious employment conditions in the region's higher education landscape.	Semi-structured interview; focus group discussion; thematic analysis	25 current daily wage teachers from universities; 12 male, 13 female.	Precarious employment framework; Social exclusion & marginalisation theory	Daily wage teachers in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan, face many complex and intersecting challenges, including social, economic, academic, administrative and psychological challenges, which collectively undermine their well-being and professional growth.	The study is limited by sample and representation constraints, data quality and interpretive challenges linked to self-reported and virtual methods, and cross-cultural and ethical factors that may reduce nuance and participant openness.

9	De Angelis and Grüning (2020) Italy	To understand how adjunct professors (APs) perceive and construct their academic careers, including their academic identities, and whether these perceptions and experiences differ by gender.	Survey and semi-structured interviews	Adjunct professors 54.4% male & 45.6% female working in Italian universities. 31 interviews with AP: (Humanities: 11; Political and Social Sciences: 9; Natural Sciences: 3; Medicine: 3; Law: 2; Engineering: 3) 15 women and 16 men. Age: over 55 years= 7 45 – 55 years = 7 under 45=16	An integration of Bourdieu's theory of fields, habitus, and capital with the concept of career, examined within the dynamics of academic capitalism and gender inequality in academia.	Gendered impact of contract conditions: Adjunct professors' careers and identities are strongly shaped by contract type and gender, with women experiencing greater economic insecurity and heavier teaching loads. Differences in focus and strategies: Male adjuncts are more research-focused and rely on informal networks; female adjuncts adopt pragmatic, externally oriented strategies and are more aware of power dynamics. Gender outweighs age: Gender has a stronger influence than age on academic identity and career strategies among adjunct professors.	No limitations stated.
10	Dordoni (2025) Italy	To examine the spatial, temporal, and emotional disruptions experienced by early-career and precarious researchers in Italy during the first national lockdown (March-April 2020) and their engagement in remote academic work.	10 narrative video interviews and 30 participant-generated images.	Precarious researchers in the social sciences and humanities (SSHs) within Italian academia.	Work-life balance, work-family conflict, and the management of work-family boundaries.	The findings highlight the implosion of boundaries between paid work, care, family life, and personal space and how this disarticulation exacerbated existing inequalities, particularly for women and caregivers.	Online platforms can limit personal interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee.
11	Hlatshwayo (2024) South Africa	1. What are the lived experiences of postdocs in South African higher education? 2. And how can postdocs be supported to access, navigate and succeed in higher education?	Interview; Thematic analysis	23 former and current postdocs in 3 research-intensive universities in South Africa. 22 black and 3 white; 15 women and 10 men.	Neoliberalism in higher education; Colonising logic	The findings reveal mainly two important aspects of the postdoc journey: 1. The crippling challenges of employment insecurity and job insecurity on postdocs' well-being and livelihood. 2. The often hidden, unseen, and invisible "motherhood penalty" that women postdoc experience in attempting to balance motherhood and the demands of the postdoctoral work.	No limitations stated.

12	Hlatshwayo (2025) South Africa	To explore and theorise the precarious lives of 8 postdocs in a research-intensive university in South Africa.	Semi-structured interview	8 precarious postdoctoral research fellows in one research-intensive university in South Africa's Gauteng province.	Critical paradigm, which is rooted in Critical Theory	Postdocs are not recognised, supported, mentored, or guided. Postdocs navigate and negotiate employment precarity and job insecurity in their daily lives. The postdoc system is inherently a gendered and patriarchal system that marginalises female postdocs' professional lives through career breaks and family commitments	No limitations stated.
13	Khosa et al. (2025) Australia	To understand how various factors support or inhibit casual accounting academics' job satisfaction, with a particular focus on motivation and well-being.	Semi-structured interviews - life story interview; Thematic analysis	20 casual accounting academics across 4 Australian universities; 11 females, 9 males; Linguistic backgrounds split between English first-language speakers (n = 9) and speakers of other first languages (n = 11)	Two-factor motivation-hygiene theory; Self-determination theory.	Subject coordinators' supervision and interpersonal relationships are crucial in meeting casual academics' psychological needs for autonomy and relatedness, which enhances motivation and well-being. Casual accounting academics lack both hygiene and motivation factors needed for good motivation and well-being; their motivation and well-being are harmed by poor reward systems, job insecurity, limited communication from the university and few professional development opportunities. The study emphasises the importance of supporting casual staff well-being to strengthen teaching quality and student learning outcomes within the accounting discipline.	A small sample of Australian casual accounting academics limits generalisability. Sampling and analysis methods may have introduced bias, even with reflexivity. COVID-19 may have influenced participants' responses. Focus on psychological well-being only, not physical or social well-being.

14	Kınikoğlu and Can (2021) UK	To explore how early-career academics negotiate the different degrees of precarity in the UK academia under the amplified uncertainties brought by the COVID-19 pandemic.	Online semi-structured interviews	Nine early-career academics (Six women and three men), from the fields of social sciences and humanities	Critical view of neoliberal higher education; precarity is gendered, racialised, and shaped by social/cultural capital and institutional structures.	The gap between research and teaching roles grew wider during the pandemic, with researchers in stronger positions and those in teaching positions entrapped in worsening gendered working and living conditions. Academics with better research roles, supportive living conditions, or higher status in the “hierarchies of precariousness” could use the crisis to their advantage. Precarity could be managed when early-career academics had social capital, favourable structural conditions (e.g., leading research, teaching specialised courses, or having strong institutional support), and the ability to bring funding into the university.	Small sample; not generalisable; limited coverage of class, race, ethnicity; context-specific to UK higher education during the pandemic.
15	Kınikoğlu and Can (2025) UK & US	To explore how early-career academics (ECA) conceive, experience, and negotiate precarity in the two similar yet structurally different higher education contexts of the UK and the USA.	Semi-structured interviews	20 early-career academics who had current or previous precarious employment status in academia from the field of social sciences and humanities.	Neoliberalism, meritocracy, gendered inequalities, and stigma	ECA view themselves as lucky to secure academic positions, even if temporary. Women were disproportionately affected by precarious work and life conditions. US ECAs pinpointed the stigma associated with adjunct positions, leading to physical and scholarly exclusion of adjuncts from universities.	Small sample

16	Kouritzin et al. (2023) Canada	How do English language teachers teaching in research focused universities define (1) their professional identities in relation to their working conditions and (2) notions of instructor competence in relation to evaluation metrics and contract renewal?	Semi-structured interviews; Job advertisement analysis; Thematic analysis; discourse analysis	9 course instructors teaching the non-credit preparation English for Academic Purposes (EAP) programs in 2 universities.	Social positioning theory	The prevalence of underpaid work and the use of student evaluation as surveillance and measure of competence to determine the instructors' continued contract renewal contribute to frustration, feelings of exploitation and an increased reliance on magic time- an infinite category of work time. The imposition of magic time contributes negatively to the instructors' sense of professional dignity.	No limitations stated.
17	Mason and Megoran (2021) England	To explore how academics experience work as either humanising or dehumanising, with an emphasis on contractual type (fixed-term or open-ended).	Visual timeline interviews	17 interviews with academics in universities in the Northeast of England.	African American theological anthropology	The findings suggest that academics on casual contract are dehumanising in four ways: it renders individuals invisible; it leaves them vulnerable to exploitation; it denies them academic freedom; and it hampers them in constructing a life narrative projecting into the future. These academics can also find work humanising through meaningful teaching, collegial relationships, and intellectual engagement that fostered belonging and purpose.	The study focuses mostly on universities in the UK, which means experiences in other countries might be different. The study looks at casualisation mainly from a moral and human rights angle, it doesn't explore the detailed economic or policy factors behind it.

18	Meletiadiou (2024) Cyprus & UK	RQ1 Which were the enablers that precarious Greek-Cypriot female early-career academics had when working in universities in the UK versus in Greek-Cypriot higher education institutions? RQ2 Which were the barriers that precarious Greek-Cypriot female early-career academics faced when working in universities in the UK versus in Greek-Cypriot higher education institutions?	Semi-structured interviews; Thematic analysis	22 Greek-Cypriot female early-career academics who have worked in universities in the UK and Cyprus.	Postcolonial theory; Dimechian theory; Postcolonial feminism	Greek-Cypriot early-career women academics faced patriarchy, unfair pay, limited career progress, heavy workloads, and work-family conflict; in the UK, they also experienced isolation and depended on migrant networks for support. Temporary contracts led to financial insecurity, limited promotion opportunities, and a gendered division of labour where women were pushed into teaching/administration while men focused on research. Key supports came from managers, colleagues, friends, and family, while major barriers included career advancement blocks, sexual harassment, unfair pay, and work-life balance challenges.	The study is constrained by a small, narrowly defined sample from a limited number of institutions, a focus on a specific national and demographic group, reliance on subjective qualitative data, and the absence of large-scale or cross-institutional comparisons, limiting generalisability and broader policy relevance.
19	Menard (2025) UK	1. What defines long-term researchers (LTRs) as a distinct group and what are the implications for understanding academic labour structures? 2. Are the structures perpetuating long-term precarious employment in UK higher education shaped by systemic factors or by institution specific practices?	Survey	179 LTRs in UK universities, majority in STEM disciplines. Duration as LTR 56%: 8-12 years 13%: 13-16 years 13%: 17-20 years 18%: >20 years	No theory stated.	Universities and funding bodies use systemic mechanisms-such as exclusionary career frameworks, exploitative hierarchies, lack of mentoring, and normalised precarity - that marginalise LTRs. LTRs contribute significantly (e.g., securing grants, sustaining research, teaching, supervising) but receive little recognition or career progression opportunities. Bullying and discrimination, linked to age, gender, and caring responsibilities-affect 40% of participants, and combined with the illusion of meritocracy, these factors reinforce inequalities in higher education.	The survey did not ask if participants were paid for extra teaching work, limiting understanding of LTRs' contributions. It did not include equality data, so it cannot fully analyse inequalities related to race or disability.

20	Morris (2025) UK	RQ1: How do women academics in the early-career narrate their experiences of precarity? RQ2: In what ways are their experiences shaped by gender and interrelated dimensions of power?	Mixed qualitative methods – open-text survey, focus groups and 12 narrative interviews	Women academics on short-term contracts in a research-intensive university.	Feminist standpoint theory; Intersectionality	Women early-career academics experienced daily precarity marked by insecurity, exclusion, exploitation, and mental health strain, intensified by intersecting identities such as gender, race, citizenship, caregiving, disability, and sexuality. They faced gendered inequalities, including fewer opportunities for voice and advancement than men, and a heavier load of academic housework that restricted time for career-building work. Emotional labour and well-being needs were often ignored, leaving many women feeling resigned to precarity and pressured to perform as “ideal academics,” with those lacking financial or social support facing the greatest disadvantage.	The study is limited by its partial intersectional scope, potentially overlooking how experiences vary across different social positions, and by its focus on immediate needs, which restricts insight into the long-term trajectories of academic women.
21	Morris and Rowell (2024) UK	To explore the gendered day-to-day lived experiences of marginalised teaching-only academic staff on insecure contracts through the lens of space and place.	Collaborative auto-ethnography (walking tour and 'bimbling', co-interviews and reflections)	2 early-career postdoctoral academics on temporary contracts in a university.	Feminist theories of space-place	Precariously employed, feminised, and marginalised staff experience multidimensional precarity—material, social, epistemic, and emotional—as neoliberal management and performativity heighten exploitation and make the workforce feel disposable. Academic spaces create uncertain and shifting feelings of belonging, where liminal positions expose career instability, power imbalances, and the lack of recognition, resources, and support for temporary staff despite their role in sustaining institutional success. These conditions limit knowledge creation, pedagogical development, and academic flourishing, restricting the ability of precarious academics to fully participate, contribute, and grow within the academy.	The study is limited by a very small, single-institution sample, the narrow scope of autoethnographic perspectives shaped by institutional power dynamics, and the fluid, time-dependent nature of experiences of belonging and precarity, which constrains generalisability to wider contexts.

22	Myers (2022) UK	To examine the experiences of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) academics on zero-hours contracts (ZHC) in terms of job satisfaction and dissatisfaction, explore how these contracts shape their relationships with colleagues, including perceived status and workplace conflict, and analyse how race and racism, at both individual and structural levels, influence their ZHC conditions and outcomes.	Semi-structured interviews; Grounded theory	21 Black and minority ethnic backgrounds (BME) at 3 universities	Risk Society; Habitus and Fields; Risk Culture.	BME academics on ZHCs face unequal treatment compared with permanent colleagues, as employment risk is shifted from institutions to individuals and their agency is constrained by precarious and racialised structures. Race and racism shape how risk and security are distributed, protecting White academics' interests while limiting opportunities and long-term stability for BME staff. A collective habitus within departments helps maintain security for dominant groups, reinforcing inequalities in status, protection, and career progression for BME academics on ZHCs.	• Based on 21 BME academics; limited generalisability • Focus on UK universities; may not apply globally • Primarily examines interpersonal and departmental dynamics; systemic factors not fully explored • No non-BME comparison group included
23	Nichols (2023) Canada	(1) What are your working conditions? (2) How is underemployment impacting your career trajectory? (3) How is underemployment affecting your physical and mental health?	In-depth interviews	26 adjunct instructors recruited via university unions across Ontario; 13 females, 13 males; 13 immigrants & 13 Canadian-born.	No theory stated.	Five themes: 1. Poor working conditions 2. Negative impacts of long-term underemployment on career trajectories 3. Negative health impacts 4. Exploitation under neoliberal policy 5. Gender, childcare, and work-life balance issues.	No limitations stated.
24	O'Keefe and Courtois (2019) Ireland	To explore the relationship between gender and precarity in Irish higher education.	Online questionnaire	181 precarious academics; 125 females and 56 males; 78% from Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences.	Concept of citizenship and non-citizenship	Precarious female academics are non-citizens of the academy, a status reproduced through exploitative gendered practices and evident in formal/legal recognition (staff status, rights and entitlements, pay and valuing of work) as well as in informal dimensions (social and decision-making power).	The study relied on qualitative data, which provides depth but reduces the ability to generalise findings to all precariously employed academics.

25	Porter et al. (2020) US	To illuminate and centre the lived experiences of 4 Black women serving as contingent faculty, influenced by the intersections of race, gender, and academic appointment.	Scholarly personal narratives	Four Black women researcher-participants on full-time contingent positions at 3 different research universities.	Black feminist thought; Intersectionality	1) Marginalisation of contingent faculty 2) The intersections of their identities inextricably linked to teaching 3) Devaluation of scholarly pursuits in their departments	No limitations stated.
26	Rao et al. (2021) Britain	To examine how formal and informal teaching support structures shape Graduate Teaching Assistants' (GTA) experiences of accessing and navigating the doctoral student–researcher–teacher borderlands within a neoliberal culture of precarity. To explore how institutional structural inequalities influence GTA's capacity to move beyond the doctoral student–researcher–teacher borderlands under conditions of precarity.	Qualitative case study; Interview; Thematic analysis	8 doctoral students at 2 British universities; 6 females, 2 males.	Borderland theory	Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) occupy a liminal space between student, researcher, and teacher roles, often experiencing uncertainty, stress, limited rights, and vulnerability to exploitation as they pursue academic careers. Their capacity to manage these challenges is strongly influenced by the availability of formal and informal support, with positive supervisory relationships and access to structured professional development fostering greater belonging and confidence. Unequal access to support across institutions leads to isolation and confusion for some GTAs, and these structural inequalities affect who can successfully transition from the borderlands to stable academic identities.	The study's findings are limited by reliance on GTAs' experiences from a small number of institutions, a primary focus on the borderland framework, and the underrepresentation of universities with fewer doctoral students and resources, which reduces generalisability.
27	Schofield (2022) UK	What does it mean for precariously employed Black staff to face and challenge racialised acts and have their expertise questioned by students?	Autoethnography	A Black educator on a precarious contract from a UK university.	Critical race theory	Precarious employment practices perpetuate inequality in the discipline of development studies by limiting the ability of Black educators to confront or challenge abuse.	No limitations stated.

28	Smele et al. (2021) Canada	How precariously employed academic women experience student evaluations of teaching (SETs) and the broader equity impacts of their use.	Semi-structured interviews	21 female contract faculty & 13 female sessional instructors from a university in Ontario. 24 from the field of humanities and social sciences; 10 from engineering, maths and natural sciences.	Intersectional feminist approach to understanding lived experiences.	Student evaluations of teaching (SETs) creates customer-service pressures by framing students as customers, which can make women academics feel disposable. SETs restrict professional autonomy by influencing key career decisions like hiring, promotion, and contract renewal, often pressuring women to conform by “teaching to the evaluation.” Women academics engage in hidden emotional labour such as managing perceptions of their gender, age, and race through caring behaviours and accent modification, which, combined with these pressures, leads to serious mental health impacts like anxiety and depression, thereby perpetuating gendered, racialised, and age-based inequalities in academia.	Small sample size - the study focuses on a relatively small number of precariously employed academic women. Single institution - findings are drawn from one institution, limiting generalisability.
29	Solomon and Du Plessis (2023b) South Africa	To explore the lived experiences of temporary academic staff in South African higher education institutions.	Semi-structured interviews; Thematic analysis	26 temporary academic staff (69% female, 75% black, 25% white) from 3 universities	No theory stated.	Six themes: 1. Negotiating desire vs despair 2. Living in limbo 3. Stunted career growth 4. Disillusionment and emotions of exploitation 5. Marginalised as an outsider 6. Feeling dehumanised Temporary academics stated a desire for fair human resource support, recognition, and being valued for their contribution to the academy, similar to their permanent/ full-time counterparts.	The study was limited by the exclusion of HR professionals and line managers’ perspectives, a small sample size, and limited representation across universities, which restricted the breadth and diversity of insights.

30	Steinþórsdóttir et al. (2019) Iceland	Do the financial and managerial procedures and processes of academic institutions have different consequences for Social Science and Humanities (SSH) and STEM, and therefore, unintended, gendered consequences for precarious knowledge workers? If so, how does this manifest itself?	Mixed-method qualitative case study using semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and secondary statistical data.	32 early-career academics (PhD candidates, postdocs, sessional lecturers, temporary assistant professors) from an Icelandic university in STEM and SSH fields	Gender budgeting	New managerialism reinforces the precarious position of early-career academics, especially women and those in the more feminised fields. The system's bias in favour of the culturally masculine, or hard sciences, impacts early-career academics disproportionately- STEM departments are able to provide more advantageous positions and better working conditions for their early-career academics, who are mostly men, than the more feminised SSH school Structural gender bias is demonstrated in each of the first three stages of an academic career: PhD, postdoc and other temporary positions, and assistant professorship.	No limitations stated.
31	Stewart et al. (2021) Canada & US	To document the stories of 4 precariously employed communication instructors in their transition to emergency remote teaching in March 2020.	Critical collaborative auto-ethnography and performative writing	4 precariously employed communication instructors	No theory stated.	Participants experienced technological frustrations, mental health concerns, accent barriers, financial stresses, care work, and illness when they had to suddenly teach online during the pandemic. There was relentless uncertainty about job security.	No limitations stated.
32	Stewart et al. (2024) Canada	To document and critically examine the experiences of 3 early-career contingent scholars during the COVID-19 pandemic, focusing on precarity, mobility, and systemic inequities, and to highlight structural challenges in the neoliberal gig academy.	Critical collaborative auto-ethnography	3 early-career scholars, all contingent instructors, researchers, or both, working at multiple universities.	No theory stated.	Contingent early-career academics experienced intensified precarity during the pandemic, including unstable contracts, workload pressures, and financial insecurity. The “return to campus” period heightened emotional stress, burnout, and a sense of institutional disregard for contingent staff well-being. Collaborative autoethnography revealed shared struggles and a collective critique of structural inequities embedded in the neoliberal academic system.	No limitations stated.

33	Stringer et al. (2018) New Zealand	To explore, in relation to gender, the extent of precarious academic employment at the case study university, academic experiences of this kind of work, how they perceived its effects on career-path and whether participating in such work can be said to be elective or actively chosen in preference to more secure work.	Statistical and inductive analysis of a mixed-method survey; Case study of a university	915 academic staff, where 41% were confirmed and full-time; 54% female, 45% male; Age 20s-60s, with the most common being in the 40s	Multi-dimensional framework of labour precarity	The case study university shows extensive casualisation, with many more negative than positive experiences reported regarding precarious employment. Universities operate as gendered organisations, where women predominantly hold precarious and supportive roles that parallel traditional domestic housework. The gendered ideal worker norm assumes the most valuable employee prioritises work over domestic responsibilities. Grant-funded research-only academics, mainly in STEM, normalise and sometimes choose lucrative but insecure short-term contracts, unlike teaching-only staff.	No limitations stated.
34	Varea et al. (2021) Argentina, Sweden, Australia	To explore what early-career academics (ECAs) experienced while transitioning from undergraduate students to ECAs in the field of Physical Education (PE).	Collective biographies based on memory work.	3 female ECAs in PE	Liquid subjectivities; Risk and uncertainty.	Three main themes were constructed during the transition from students to ECAs. 1. Issues of power and gender, e.g. via surveillance and comments, produce insecurity, intimidation and discomfort. 2. Normalisation of unpaid ECA positions in Argentina creates precarious labour conditions and a constant state of insecurity. 3. Despite the disadvantages, ECA enjoy the benefits from their jobs but argued that the precariat is a liquid condition which may change at any point.	No limitations stated.
35	Willson et al. (2024) Canada	To examine how casualisation shapes and is shaped by the ways workplace information is found, shared, created, and used.	In-depth, semi-structured interviews; thematic analysis	34 teaching-focused contract academic staff working in natural sciences, humanities, social sciences and fine arts disciplines across Canadian universities.	Everyday life information seeking theory; Information marginalisation theory.	Contract academic staff experience information marginalisation and conduct their work within isolated information environments, leading to highly individualised information practices. These practices are often immobilised due to the precarious contexts that shape their work and personal lives.	No limitations stated.