



# **THE UNION ADVANTAGE**

Unions and the Response to Precarious Work Series



POVERTY AND  
EMPLOYMENT PRECARITY  
IN SOUTHERN ONTARIO



---

## **ABOUT SOCIAL PLANNING TORONTO**

Social Planning Toronto is a non-profit, charitable community organization that works to improve equity, social justice and quality of life in Toronto through community capacity building, community education and advocacy, policy research and analysis, and social reporting.

Social Planning Toronto is committed to building a “Civic Society” one in which diversity, equity, social and economic justice, interdependence and active civic participation are central to all aspects of our lives - in our families, neighbourhoods, voluntary and recreational activities and in our politics.

To find this report and learn more about Social Planning Toronto, visit [socialplanningtoronto.org](http://socialplanningtoronto.org).

## **THE UNION ADVANTAGE**

### **Unions and the Response to Precarious Work Series**

**ISBN:** 978-1-894199-38-4

Published in Toronto  
June 6, 2017

Social Planning Toronto  
2 Carlton St., Suite 1001  
Toronto, ON M5B 1J3



This report was proudly produced with unionized labour.

---

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

### RESEARCH TEAM

Mohammad Araf  
Beth Wilson  
Sean Meagher  
Anteneh Gedamu  
Dahab Ibrahim

### RESEARCH SUPPORT

Wayne Lewchuk  
Michelynn Lafleche  
Stephanie Procyk  
Elizabeth Brownlie  
Andy Mitchell  
Social Planning Toronto Research Advisory Committee  
Many thanks to our colleagues for their thoughtful research advice and helpful feedback on draft reports.

### FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS

Roxanne Dubois, Unifor  
Mary Gellatly, Parkdale Community Legal Services  
Tam Goossen, Urban Alliance on Race Relations  
Deena Ladd, Workers' Action Centre  
Tracy McMaster, OPSEU  
Joe Popadynetz, Sheet Metal Workers' & Roofers' Local 30  
David Sanders, UNITE HERE  
Navjeet Sidhu, Workers United Canada Council

### REPORT LAYOUT AND DESIGN

Ravi Joshi

### FUNDING SUPPORT

Our thanks to the Poverty and Employment Precarity in Southern Ontario (PEPSO) project led by McMaster University and United Way Toronto & York Region for providing funding support for this project. The PEPSO project is a 6-year community-university research initiative supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. We are also grateful for the ongoing financial support of our key funders, the City of Toronto and United Way Toronto & York Region.



POVERTY AND  
EMPLOYMENT PRECARIETY  
IN SOUTHERN ONTARIO



**United Way**  
Toronto & York Region

[www.unitedwaytyr.com](http://www.unitedwaytyr.com)





## THE UNION ADVANTAGE

### Unions and the Response to Precarious Work Series

---

#### SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Our analysis demonstrates that precarious employment and several of its adverse effects are less prevalent in unionized settings. It also shows that unionized workers with precarious employment experience fewer of its adverse effects. While increased access to unionization is an important part of responding to precarious employment, our results also reveal that unionization alone cannot address the full range of negative conditions associated with precarious work. As recognized by the provincial government's Changing Workplaces Review, governments have a critical role to play in enacting policies, implementing programs and enforcing labour standards to respond to the rise in precarious employment and support workers engaged in the many forms of this work.

Our results show that unionized workers are more likely than non-unionized workers to have:

- A job based on the Standard Employment Relationship (i.e. permanent full-time jobs

with employer-provided benefits and statutory protections) or permanent part-time work

- A higher individual income
- Employer-provided pension, benefits and paid time off
- More stable income and work schedule
- A full-time work week of 30-40 hours
- An income that stayed the same or increased compared to the previous year
- Slightly higher self-reported mental health ratings
- Lower ratings on some employment-related stress measures

Even after taking into account the effects of gender, age, race, immigration status and education level required for the job, our research shows the benefits of unionization. Using multivariate analyses, we found that, after controlling for other factors, union coverage is associated with having a job based on the Standard Employment Relationship, an individual income above \$40,000, employer-provided pension, benefits and paid time off, a stable income, a full-time work week of 30-40 hours, and an individual income that did not decline compared to the previous year.

Multivariate analyses showed no significant differences between unionized and non-unionized workers on self-reported health, most measures of employment-related stress or experiences of workplace discrimination.

---

Even among precarious workers<sup>1</sup>, unionization is associated with having:

- A higher individual income
- Employer-provided pension, benefits and paid time off
- More stable income

Even after using multivariate analyses to take into account other factors, union coverage for precarious workers is associated with having an individual income above \$40,000, employer-provided pension and benefits and paid time off.

The advantages of union membership are well documented<sup>2,3,4</sup> and supported by this research. But in Toronto, only 22.5% of workers belong to a union or are covered by a collective agreement, a rate lower than the provincial and national rates of unionization.<sup>5</sup> Legislative change that makes it easier for workers to join unions is one means to respond to the rise in precarious employment and its negative consequences for workers.

While demonstrating the benefits of unionization, our analysis also points to the limits of unionization to single-handedly mitigate the full range of adverse effects of precarious employment on workers. The legislative context

has a major impact on the workplace realities of residents.

Based on our analysis and supported by related studies, we make the following policy recommendations:

- Ensure that the Labour Relations Act improves access to unionization and protects workers in unions when contracting out takes place
- Reform the Employment Standards Act to ensure fair working conditions for the most vulnerable workers
- Improve access to public and community services for workers without access to benefits

Through our focus group discussion with representatives from the labour movement and worker advocacy organizations, we have also identified the following opportunities for the labour movement to respond to rising employment precarity:

- Leverage collective bargaining in an effort to minimize precarity
- Organize by sector
- Address tiered collective agreements
- Support a strong social safety net

1 In this analysis, precarious employment refers to casual, contract, temporary and temp agency work, own-account self-employment, full-time work with no employer-provided benefits beyond a wage, and employment where there is uncertainty about keeping the job in the next 12 months. This definition corresponds to the categories of “precarious” and “other” referred to in Figure 5.

2 Jackson, A. (2003). In Solidarity: The union advantage. Ottawa, Ontario: Canadian Labour Congress.

3 Sran, G., Lynk, M., Clancy, J. & Fudge, D. (2013). Unions Matter: How the ability of labour unions to reduce income inequality and influence public policy has been affected by regressive labour laws. Ottawa, Ontario: Canadian Foundation for Labour Rights.

4 Canadian Labour Congress (2014). The Union Advantage for Provincial and Territorial Breakdown: Ontario. Available at: <http://canadianlabour.ca/why-unions/provincial-and-territorial-breakdown/ontario>

5 Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, 2016 annual data accessed through the City of Toronto website.



# INTRODUCTION

The Union Advantage, the first report in our Unions and the Response to Precarious Work series, looks at the role of unions in protecting workers against precarious employment and its adverse effects. This series draws on survey data from the Poverty and Employment Precarity in Southern Ontario (PEPSO) project collected in 2011-12 and 2014.<sup>6</sup> Our analysis is based on a sample of 2,754 workers, aged 25-64, living in the city of Toronto. It also incorporates findings from a literature review and a focus group with representatives from the labour movement and worker advocacy organizations.

In Toronto, less than half of workers have jobs based on the Standard Employment Relationship, where employees have full-time permanent work with social benefits and statutory entitlements.<sup>7</sup> Instead, the labour market is flooded with temporary and contract work and full-time jobs that lack any benefits beyond a wage. Precarious

employment carries with it many challenges for workers, including a greater likelihood of experiencing household, workplace and income stress.<sup>8</sup>

Unions play a role in addressing many of these issues in the labour market, providing a shared voice for workers, negotiating wages, improved working conditions and protections for their members, as well as advocating for public policies that protect all workers regardless of union representation.<sup>9,10,11</sup> The rise of precarious employment presents challenges for the labour movement, requiring unions to respond to changing circumstances and increasing downward pressure on wages, benefits and working conditions.

In this report, we examine the extent to which unionization protects workers against precarious employment, mitigates the adverse consequences of precarious employment, and improves the wages and working conditions of precarious workers.

---

6 This analysis uses survey data on employed workers, aged 25-64, living in the city of Toronto. Two groups of workers are excluded from the analysis: self-employed individuals with employees and workers with incomes over \$100,000 who also require a degree for their job. These individuals are excluded from the analysis because they are likely to hold management positions where unionization does not apply.

7 Lewchuk, W. et al. (2015). *The Precarity Penalty: The impact of employment precarity on individuals, households and communities – and what we can do about it*. Toronto, Ontario: United Way Toronto & McMaster University.

8 *ibid.*

9 Jackson, A. (2003). *In Solidarity: The union advantage*. Ottawa, Ontario: Canadian Labour Congress.

10 Sran, G., Lynk, M., Clancy, J. & Fudge, D. (2013). *Unions Matter: How the ability of labour unions to reduce income inequality and influence public policy has been affected by regressive labour laws*. Ottawa, Ontario: Canadian Foundation for Labour Rights.

11 Canadian Labour Congress (2014). *The Union Advantage for Provincial and Territorial Breakdown: Ontario*. Available at: <http://canadianlabour.ca/why-unions/provincial-and-territorial-breakdown/ontario>

---

*The Union Advantage is the first in our Unions and the Response to Precarious Work series. Social Planning Toronto has produced this series to inform public debate and provincial policy-making as the Ontario government considers its plan of action in response to the Changing Workplaces Review.*

*Social Planning Toronto's analysis highlights the experiences of workers, aged 25-64, living in the City of Toronto. It draws on data from the Poverty and Employment Precarity in Southern Ontario (PEPSO) project, a 6-year community-university research initiative led by United Way Toronto & York Region and McMaster University. Social Planning Toronto is a community partner on the PEPSO project.*

*Future reports in this series will examine the role of unionization in protecting workers against precarious employment for groups of workers defined by gender, age, race and immigration status.*



# FINDINGS

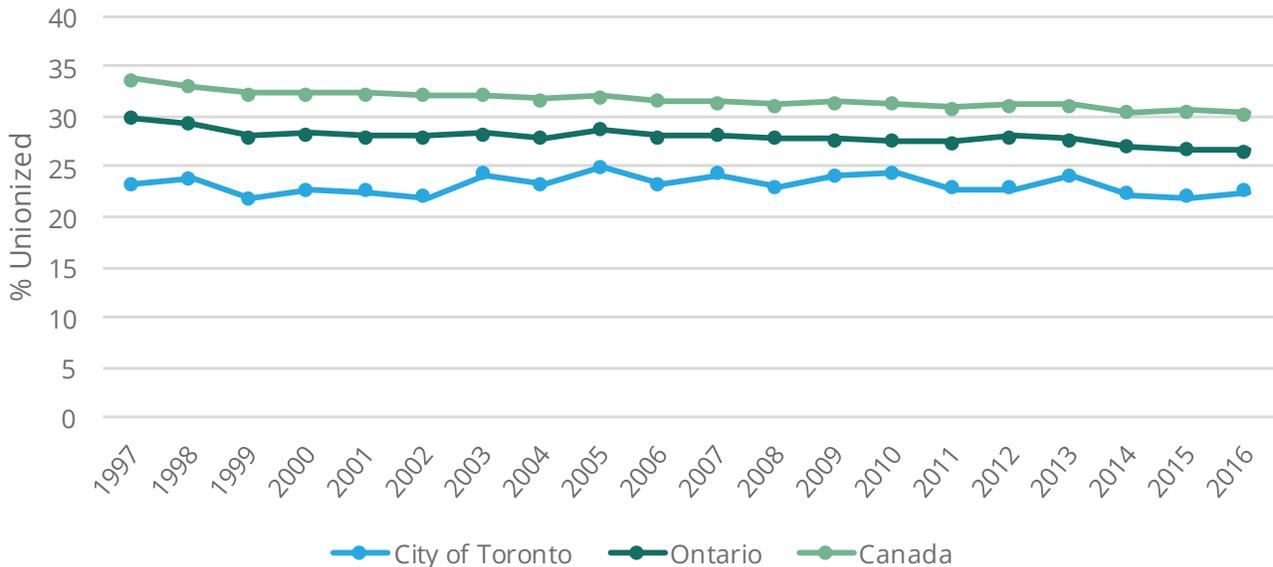
## A. UNIONIZATION RATES

As shown in Figure 1, only 22.5% of Toronto workers are members of a union or covered by a collective agreement. Toronto's unionization rate has shown small fluctuations over the past 19 years, ranging from a high of 24.9% in 2005 to a

low of 21.8% in 1999. Toronto's unionization rate has been consistently lower than the rates for Ontario or Canada. The Canadian rate, which is consistently highest among the three, has shown a slow decline from 33.7% in 1997 to 30.3% in 2016. Ontario's rate, which is lower than the Canadian rate, has fallen from a high of 29.9% in 1997 to its current rate of 26.7% in 2016.

Data from the early 1980s shows an even greater decline with Canada's unionization rate at 38% and Ontario's at 33.7% in 1981.<sup>12</sup>

Figure 1. Unionization Rates for Toronto, Ontario and Canada: 1997-2016



Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, 1997-2006. Accessed through the City of Toronto.

12 Galarneau, D. & Sohn, T. (2013). Long-term trends in unionization. Insights on Canadian Society. Toronto, Ontario: Statistics Canada.

*“Subcontracting, for us, is where precarity is constantly at the gates. Right now we have set up a system which basically guarantees you are going to end up with unorganized low wage workers.”*

*– Labour focus group participant*

## B. COMPARING UNIONIZED AND NON-UNIONIZED WORKERS

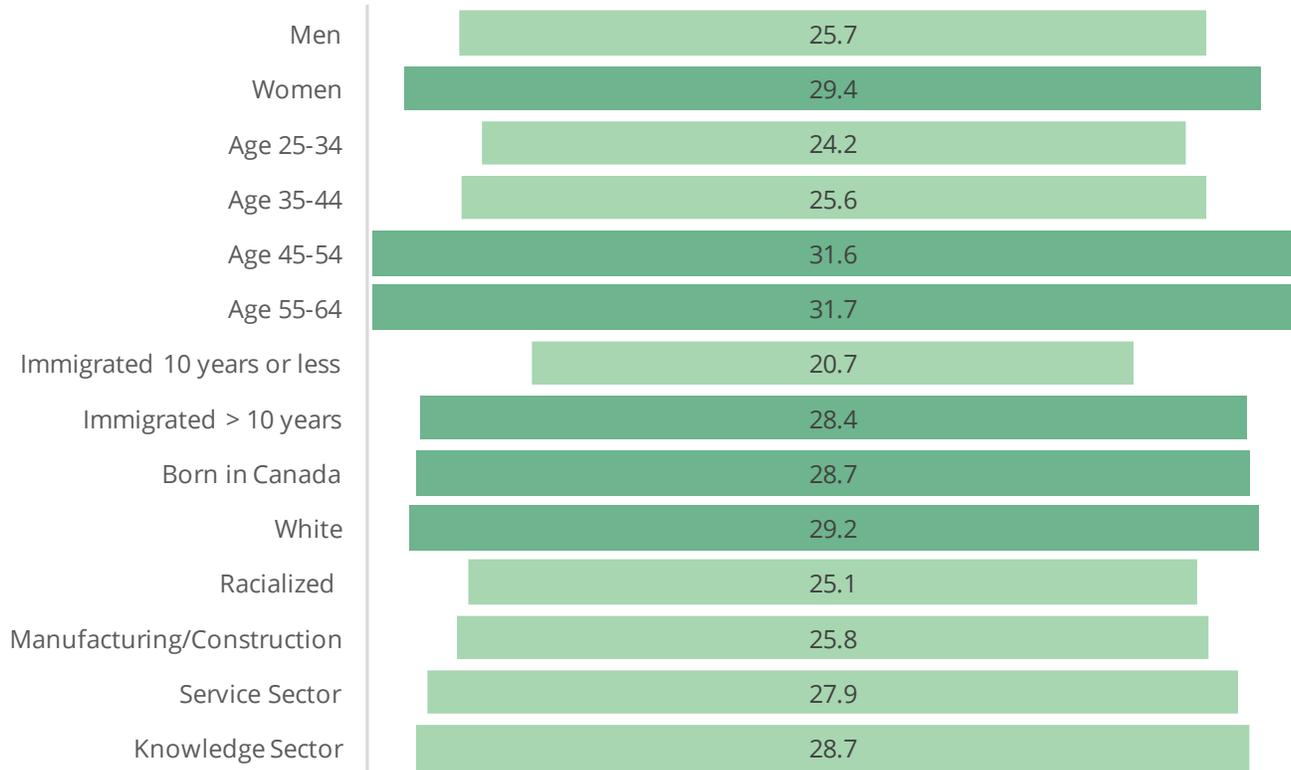
Figure 2 shows the unionization rate for each demographic and employment group based on the PEPSO survey data used in this report.<sup>13</sup> As shown, women, older workers, white workers, immigrants in Canada for over 10 years and Canadian-born workers have higher unionization rates than their respective counterparts.

While white workers have a higher rate of unionization than racialized workers in general, specific racialized groups have a similar rate of unionization to white workers including workers with the following racial backgrounds: Black (31.3%), Filipino (28.7%), South Asian (27.0%), Arab/West Asian (26.7%) and Latin American (25.6%) workers. Workers of Chinese (10.8%) and Southeast Asian (19.0%) descent have the lowest rates of unionization in our study. There are no statistically significant differences in unionization rates among sectors.<sup>14</sup> (The impact of these demographic variations will be addressed in more detail in other studies in this series.)

<sup>13</sup> Rates in Figure 2 are based on our PEPSO sample which excludes individuals in management positions. In contrast, Figure 1 uses Labour Force Survey data which includes individuals in management positions. Based on the Toronto sample using PEPSO data, 36.1% of workers with a Standard Employment Relationship or permanent part-time work belong to unions compared to 17.3% of workers with precarious employment or other types of employment that share aspects of precarity.

<sup>14</sup> Data for the Primary Sector is not shown. There are only 44 individuals from our analysis employed in the Primary Sector.

Figure 2. Unionization Rates for Selected Demographic and Employment Groups



Source: PEPSO Surveys 2011-12 & 2014. Gender:  $p < .05$ . Age:  $p < .001$ . Immigration status:  $p < .05$ . Race:  $p < .05$ . Sector: n.s.

## 1. INCOME

As shown in Figure 3, unionized workers are less likely to have low incomes<sup>15</sup> than their non-unionized counterparts. Only 28.4% of unionized workers report that they have individual annual incomes under \$40,000 compared to 44.1% of non-unionized workers. For individuals with

full-time employment, only 18.4% of unionized workers have an individual income under \$40,000 compared to 34.1% of non-unionized workers.

Variability of earnings is one indicator of precarious employment. Individuals and households with unstable incomes may have difficulties committing to activities in the future and covering expenses that can incur.

15 According to Statistics Canada (2012), the Low Income Cut Off for one person was \$23,298, \$29,004 for a household of two persons, and \$43,292 for four persons. Source: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/75f0002m/75f0002m2012002-eng.pdf> However, PEPSO studies (2013 & 2015) use the living wage rates from four regions in Ontario to define low-income household as one with less than \$60,000 in before-tax earnings from all sources. Further, low income for one person using individual income is defined as less than \$40,000. In this research, we have used individual annual income, defining low income as less than \$40,000 consistent with previous PEPSO studies.

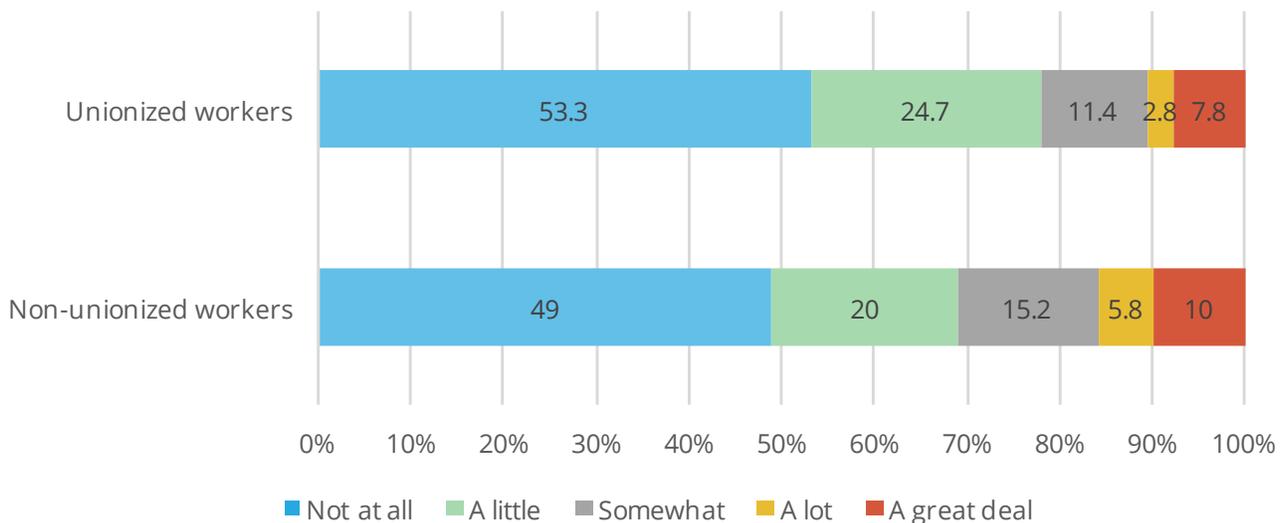
Figure 3. Unionized and Non-Unionized Workers: Individual Income



Source: PEPSO Surveys 2011-12 & 2014. p<.001

Figure 4 shows unionized workers are less likely to have had varied incomes in the 12 months preceding the survey. Just over one in five unionized workers, compared to almost one in three non-unionized workers, reported that their earnings varied a great deal, a lot or somewhat in the 12 months preceding the survey.

Figure 4. Unionized and Non-Unionized Workers: Income Varied in Last 12 Months



Source: PEPSO Surveys 2011-12 & 2014. p<.001

## 2. FORM OF EMPLOYMENT & WORKPLACE BENEFITS AND CONDITIONS

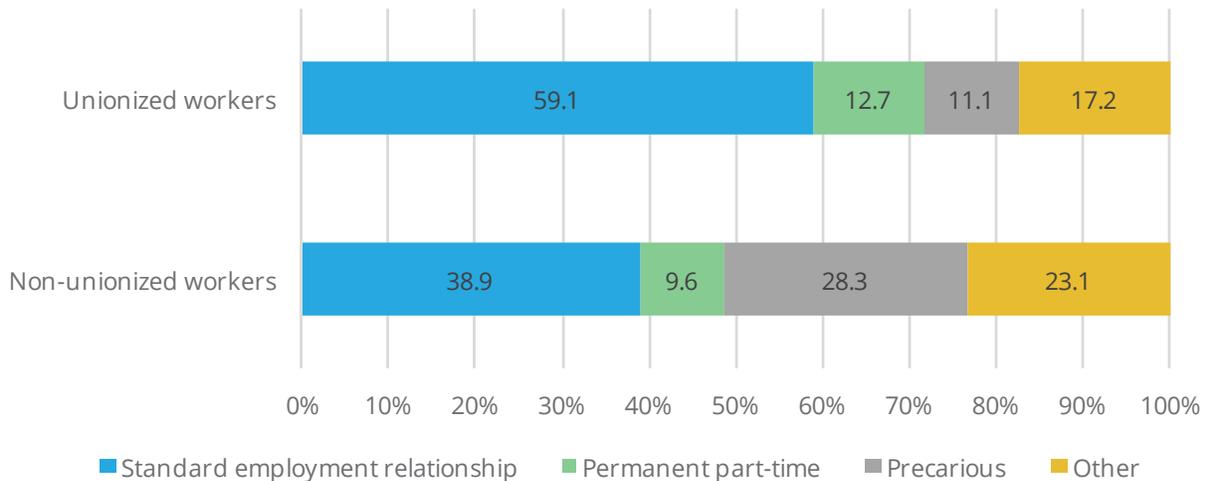
Our findings show unionized workers are less likely to be in precarious employment compared to non-unionized workers. Over half of non-unionized workers are outside of stable and secure employment compared to over one-quarter of unionized workers, as shown in Figure 5.

One of the characteristics of precarious employment is lack of access to pension, benefits and paid time off, which are key protections that promote health and well-being and allow

workers to live in dignity in old age. Our findings confirm that unionization is strongly associated with having an employer-provided pension and benefits, and also associated with having paid time off.

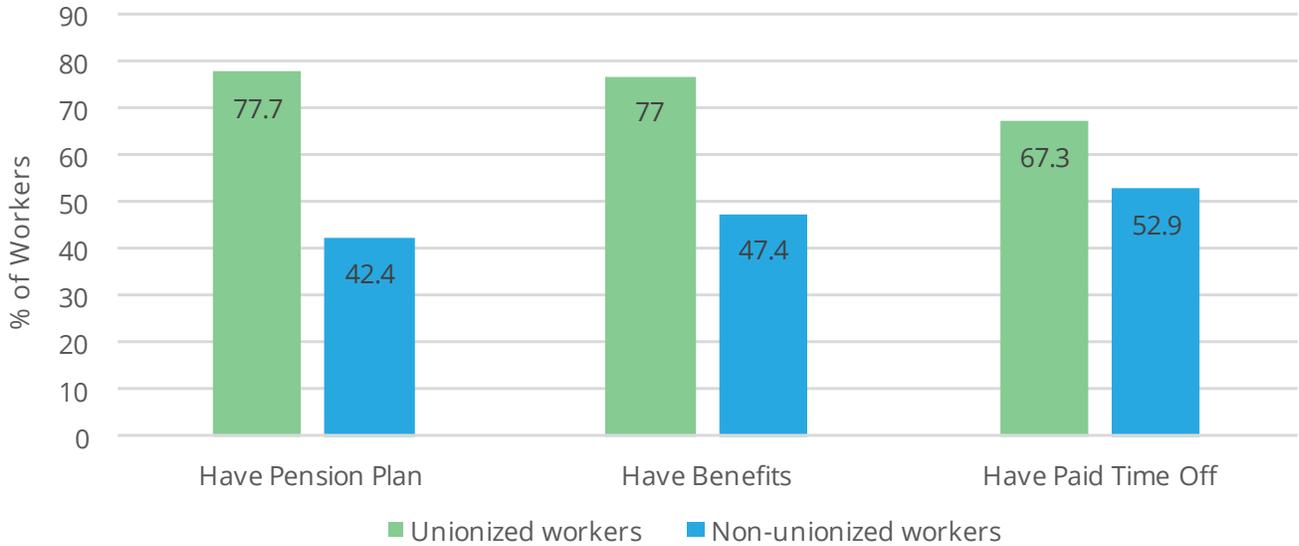
Figure 6 shows that just under 80% of unionized workers have access to a pension and benefits, while these employer-provided programs are available to less than half of non-unionized workers. Further, unionized workers are more likely to have access to paid time off than their non-unionized counterparts.

Figure 5. Unionized and Non-Unionized Workers: Form of Employment



The “Other” category includes workers who may be employed full-time but experience certain aspects of precarity, including uncertainty about keeping their jobs in the next 12 months or work without any employer-provided benefits other than a wage. Source: PEPSO Surveys 2011-12 & 2014. p<.001

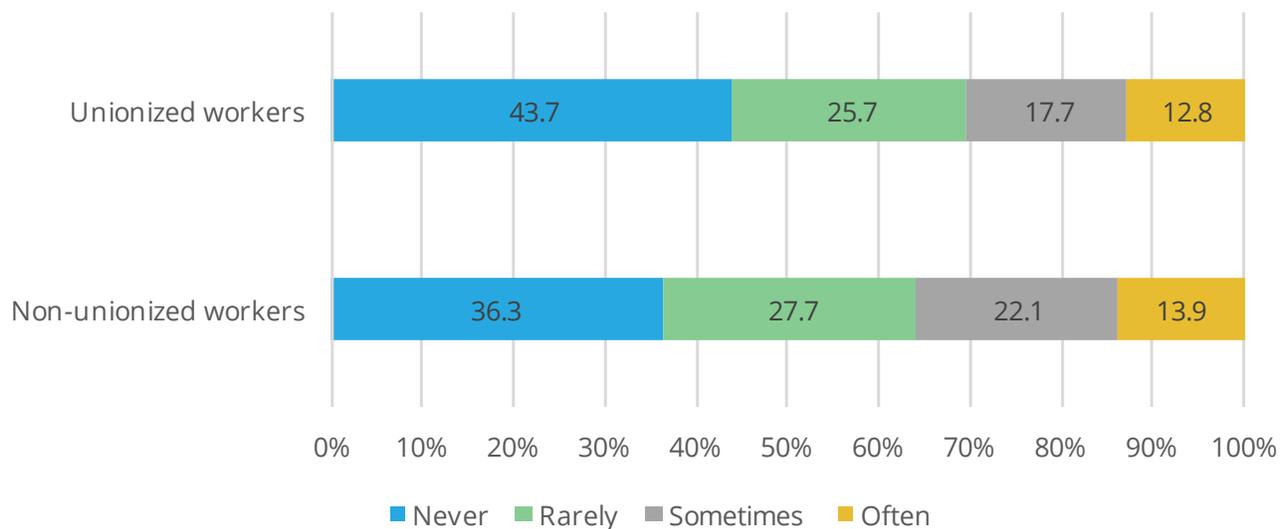
Figure 6. Unionized and Non-Unionized Workers: Pension, Benefits and Paid Time Off



Source: PEPSO Surveys 2011-12 & 2014. Pension: p<.001. Benefits: p<.001. Paid time off: p<.001

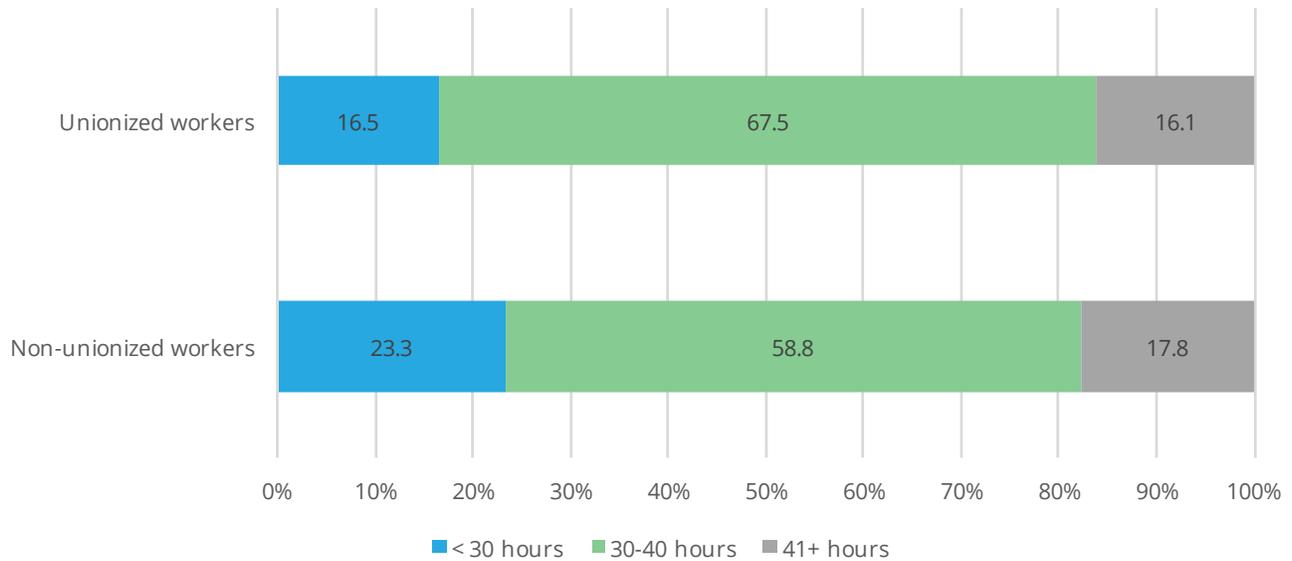
One of the defining characteristics of precarious employment is lack of stable and predictable work hours. Figure 7 shows that union members are less likely to experience unexpected work schedule changes. Figure 8 indicates that unionized workers are more likely to work a 30-40 hour week than non-unionized workers, and non-unionized workers are more likely to work fewer than 30 hours in the course of a week than unionized workers.

Figure 7. Unionized and Non-Unionized Workers: Unexpected Schedule Changes



Source: PEPSO Surveys 2011-12 & 2014. p<.01

Figure 8. Unionized and Non-Unionized Workers: Number of Hours Worked Per Week in Last 3 Months



Source: PEPSO Surveys 2011-12 & 2014. p<.001

### 3. INCOME, WORKPLACE AND HOUSEHOLD STRESS

PEPSO research documents the links between income, workplace and household stress and precarious employment.<sup>16</sup> Our analysis considers the role of unions in mitigating these stresses.

Unionized and non-unionized workers report similar levels of income-related stress, workplace and household-related stress, with a few exceptions. As shown in Figures 9 and 10, unionized workers are less likely than non-unionized workers to report struggling with paying bills and to have a change in income compared to the preceding year. Slightly higher proportions of non-unionized workers report an

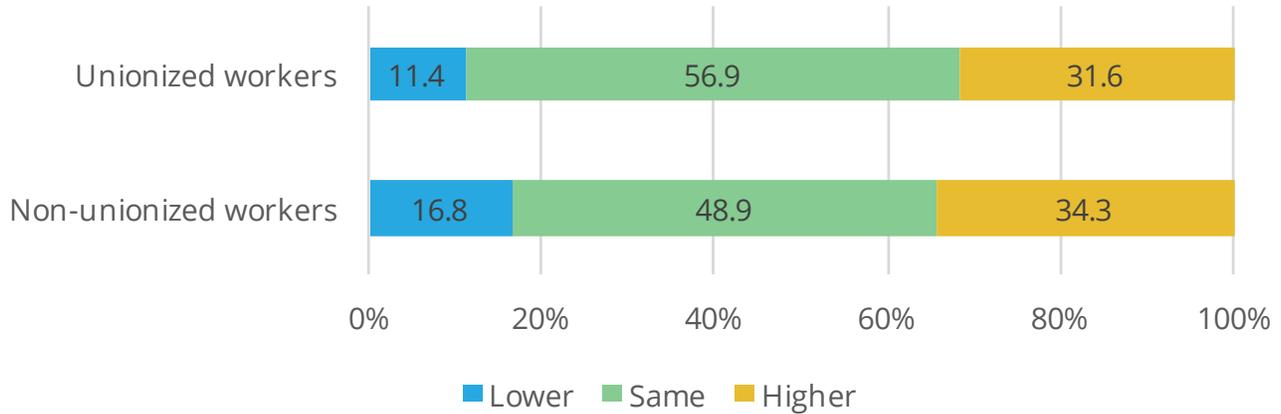
increase or a decrease in their income over the past year compared to unionized workers.

Regarding household stress related to employment, unionized workers are slightly more likely to report anxiety about their employment interfering with their personal and family lives, and uncertainty over work schedules preventing them from doing things with family and friends compared to non-unionized workers.

A focus group composed of participants working in the labour movement concurred that the increasingly unstable nature of the labour market contributes to stress for many workers regardless of their collective bargaining status.

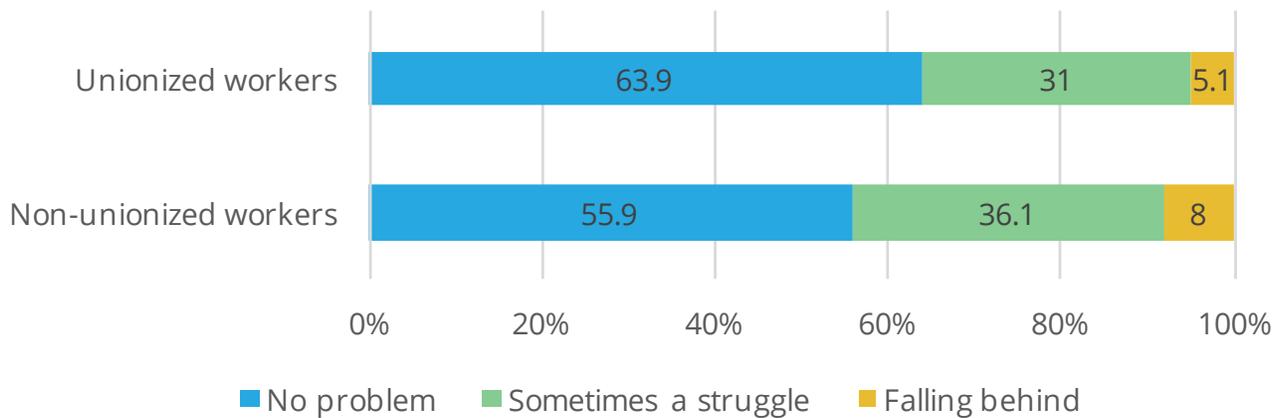
<sup>16</sup> Lewchuk, W. et al. (2015). The Precarity Penalty: The impact of employment precarity on individuals, households and communities – and what we can do about it. Toronto, Ontario: United Way Toronto & McMaster University.

Figure 9. Unionized and Non-Unionized Workers: Income Compared to Previous Year



Source: PEPSO Surveys 2011-12 & 2014. p<.001

Figure 10. Unionized and Non-Unionized Workers: Paying the Bills



Source: PEPSO Surveys 2011-12 & 2014. p<.001

#### 4. HEALTH

PEPSO research found precarious workers are more likely to report poorer mental health compared to workers in secure employment.<sup>17</sup> While low income is associated with poorer self-reported health, the study did not find a strong association between employment precarity and self-reported health. Our analysis considers the impact of unionization in these areas.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*

*“I think even when you are working in a union job where there are a bunch of temp agency contract workers working there, your sense of insecurity and stress is not necessarily mitigated because you have a union job ... the fear of losing work when everyone around you is in an insecure work even though you have a job ... over the last ten years, the prospects of lay-offs and job losses have actually been constantly over their heads.”*

*– Labour focus group participant*

Comparing unionized and non-unionized workers, we found no statistically significant differences in self-reported health.<sup>18</sup> About two-thirds of workers from both groups rated their health as very good or excellent. However, the unionized group has slightly better self-reported mental health ratings than the non-unionized groups.

One participant in our focus group suggested that the universal health care system in Canada may reduce health and mental health differences among unionized and non-unionized workers.

## **5. WORKPLACE DISCRIMINATION**

The PEPSO study found precarious workers are more likely to experience workplace discrimination compared to workers in secure employment.<sup>19</sup> Our analysis showed that unionized and non-unionized groups have similar rates of experiencing workplace discrimination. Among all Toronto workers, 12.2% report discrimination as a barrier to getting work, 6.9% as a barrier to keeping work, and 15.4% as a barrier to advancing at work.

<sup>18</sup> Even after controlling for age, union status was not associated with self-reported health.

<sup>19</sup> Lewchuk, W. et al. (2015). The Precarity Penalty: The impact of employment precarity on individuals, households and communities – and what we can do about it. Toronto, Ontario: United Way Toronto & McMaster University.

It is important to note that while PEPSO surveys include questions about experience of discrimination, they do not capture whether incidents of discrimination have been reported and appropriately resolved. This additional data is needed to better understand how unions may play a role in mitigating the experience of workplace discrimination for workers.

### **C. EXAMINING UNION ADVANTAGE USING MULTIVARIATE ANALYSES**

Findings in the previous section demonstrate a clear union advantage across several indicators. In this section, we report on results from multivariate analyses. These analyses test whether unionization is associated with positive workplace benefits and conditions even after other factors in the study are taken into account. In these analyses, we test the association between unionization and positive workplace benefits and conditions, after taking into account gender, age, race, immigration status and education required for the job.



*“I see in workplaces that some work has been contracted out and more racialized newcomers work in those jobs. This has become the new norm.”*

*– Labour focus group participant*

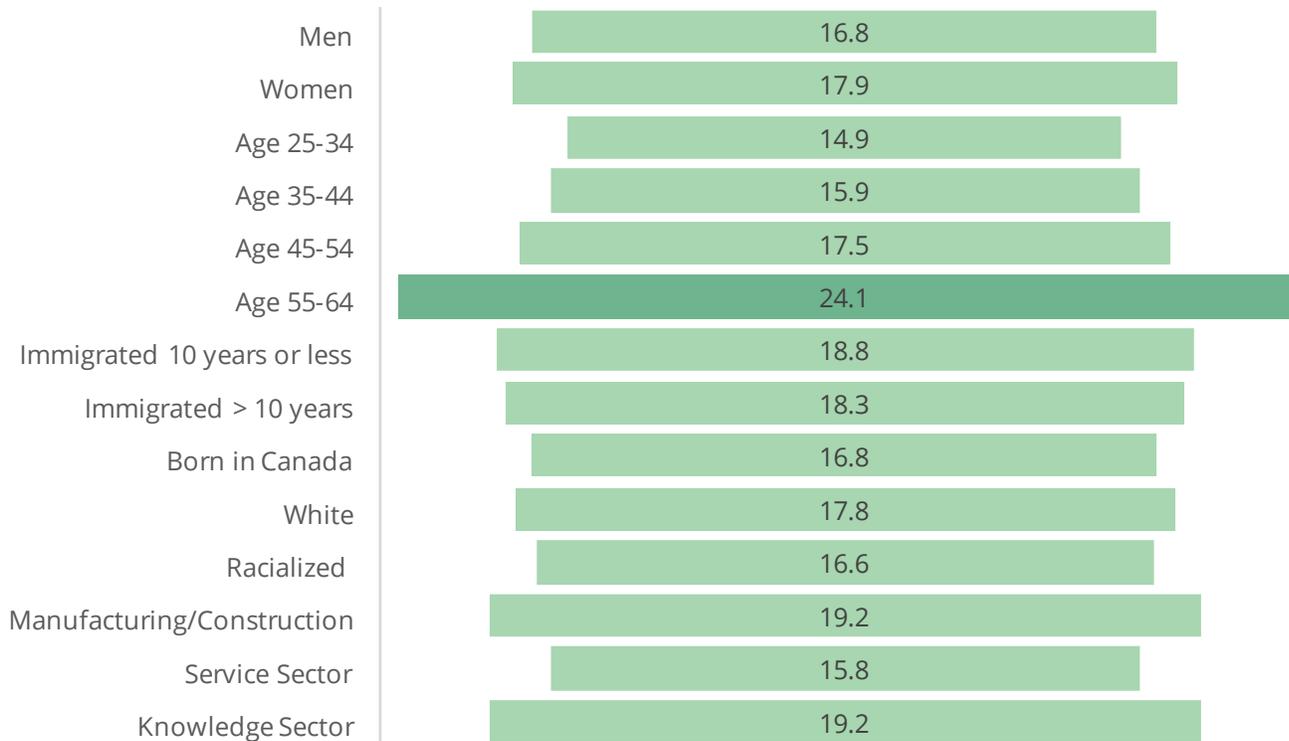
We found that, after taking into account these factors, unionization is still associated with having:

- A job based on the Standard Employment Relationship
- An individual income over \$40,000 per year
- Employer-provided pension, benefits and paid time off
- More stable income
- A full-time work week of 30-40 hours
- An individual income that did not decline since the previous year

## D. COMPARING UNIONIZED AND NON-UNIONIZED WORKERS WITH PRECARIOUS EMPLOYMENT

Figure 11 shows the unionization rates for each demographic and employment group with precarious employment. Among precarious workers, older individuals have higher unionization rates than younger people. There are no statistically significant differences in unionization rates among precarious workers by gender, immigration status, race or sector.<sup>20</sup>

Figure 11. Precarious Workers: Unionization Rates for Selected Demographic and Employment Groups



Source: PEPSO Surveys 2011-12 & 2014. Gender: n.s. Age: p<.05. Immigration status: n.s. Race: n.s. Sector: n.s.

<sup>20</sup> Data for the Primary Sector is not shown. There are only 18 individuals with precarious work in our analysis employed in the Primary Sector.

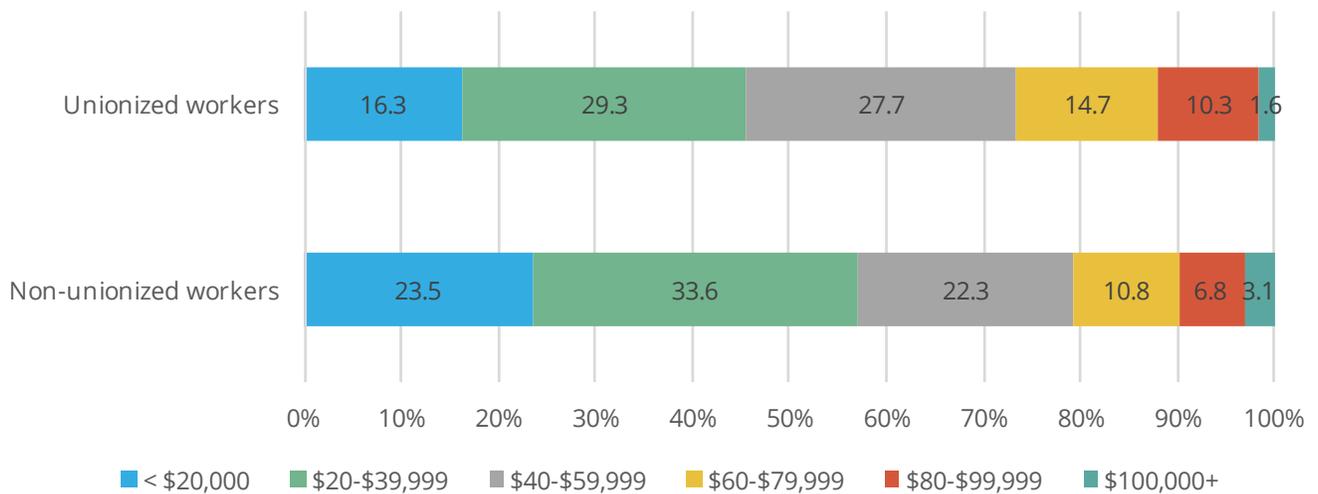
## 1. INCOME

We found that unionization has a positive impact on wages and income stability for workers with precarious employment.

Figure 12 shows that 45.6% of unionized precarious workers have individual incomes below \$40,000 compared to 57.1% of non-unionized precarious workers. Among full-time workers, the gap is even greater where 31.8% of unionized precarious workers have individual incomes below \$40,000 compared to 49.8% of non-unionized precarious workers.



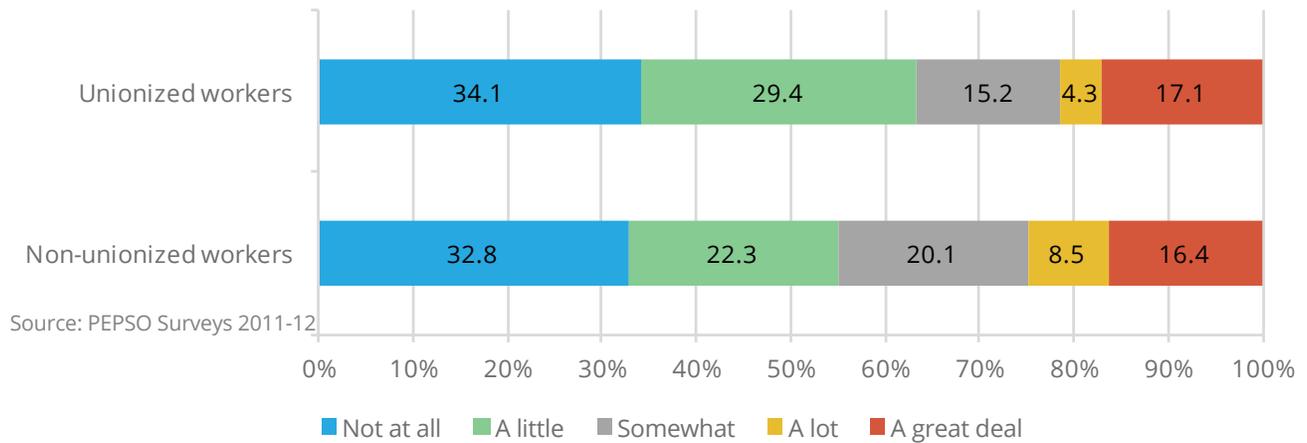
Figure 12. Unionized and Non-Unionized Precarious Workers: Individual Income



Source: PEPSO Surveys 2011-12 & 2014. p<.05

Figure 13 shows that unionized workers with precarious employment are less likely to report that their incomes have varied a great deal, a lot or somewhat compared to their non-unionized counterparts.

Figure 13. Unionized and Non-Unionized Precarious Workers: Income Varied In Last 12 Months

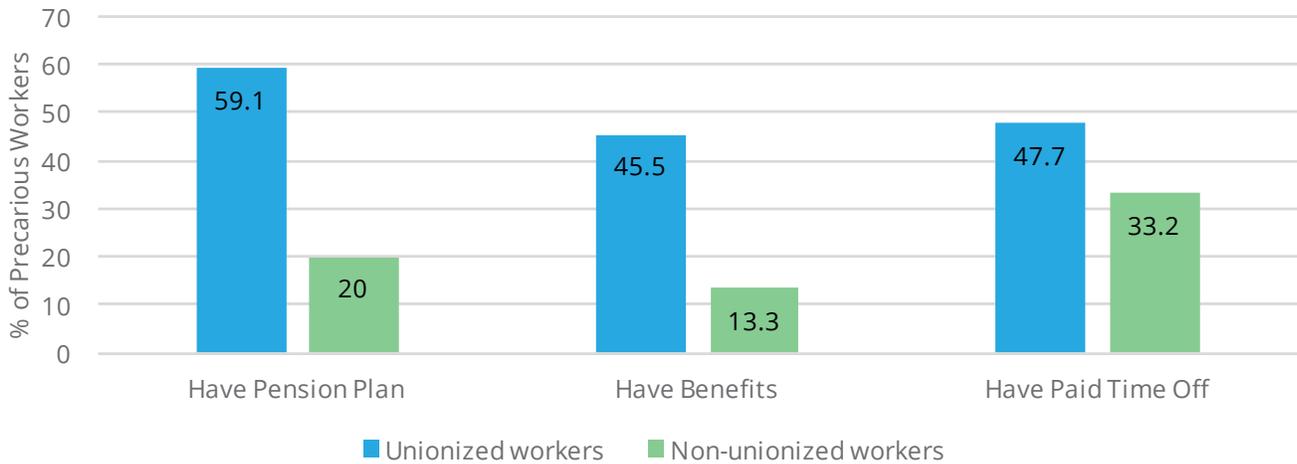


## 2. WORKPLACE BENEFITS AND CONDITIONS

Figure 14 shows unionized workers with precarious employment are much more likely to have access to employer-provided pension and benefits, and also more likely to have paid time off, compared to their non-unionized counterparts.

There are no statistically significant differences between unionized and non-unionized precarious workers in terms of number of hours worked or predictability of schedules.

Figure 14. Unionized and Non-Unionized Precarious Workers: Pension, Benefits and Paid Time Off

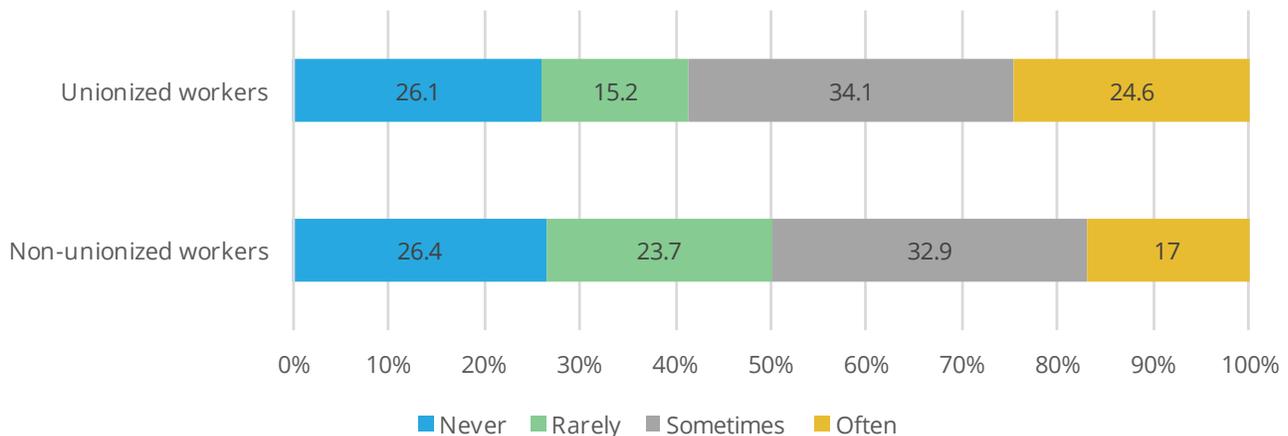


Source: PEPSO Surveys 2011-12 & 2014. Pension: p<.001. Benefits: p<.001. Paid time off: p<.001

### 3. INCOME, WORKPLACE AND HOUSEHOLD STRESS

There are no statistically significant differences between unionized and non-unionized precarious workers in terms of income or workplace stresses. Differences were found between groups with regard to household stress. As shown in Figure 15, unionized precarious workers are more likely than their non-unionized counterparts to report often or sometimes experiencing uncertainty over their work schedule that prevents them from doing things with friends and family.

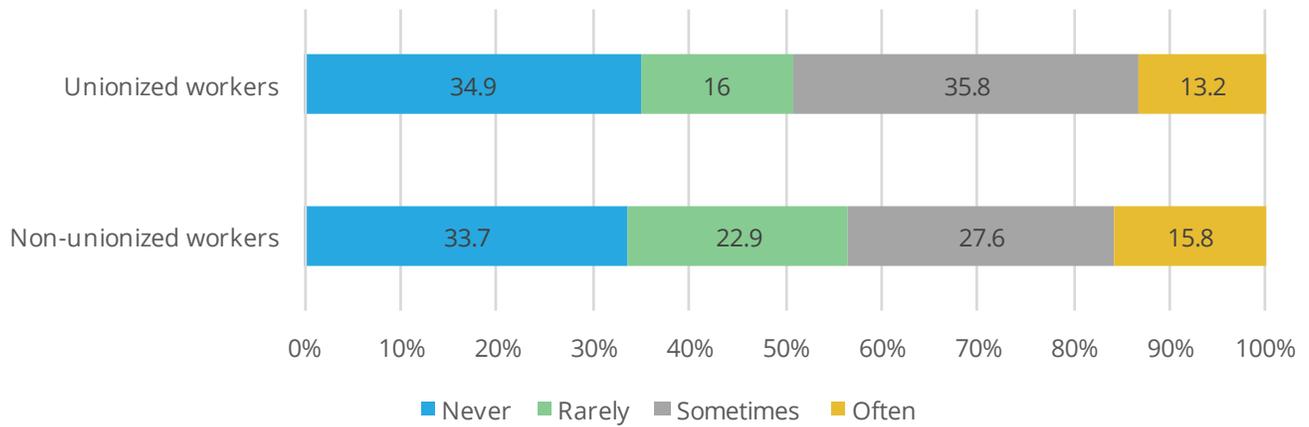
Figure 15. Unionized and Non-Unionized Precarious Workers: Uncertainty over Work Schedule Preventing Doing Things with Friends and Family



Source: PEPSO Surveys 2011-12 & 2014. p=.01

As shown in Figure 16, unionized and non-unionized precarious workers differed in the frequency that they experienced anxiety about employment interfering with personal and family life. This difference was due to a larger proportion of unionized precarious workers reporting that they sometimes have this experience compared to non-unionized precarious workers where a larger proportion reported rarely having this experience.

Figure 16. Unionized and Non-Unionized Precarious Workers: Anxiety about Employment Interfering with Personal and Family Life



Source: PEPSO Surveys 2011-12 & 2014. p<.05



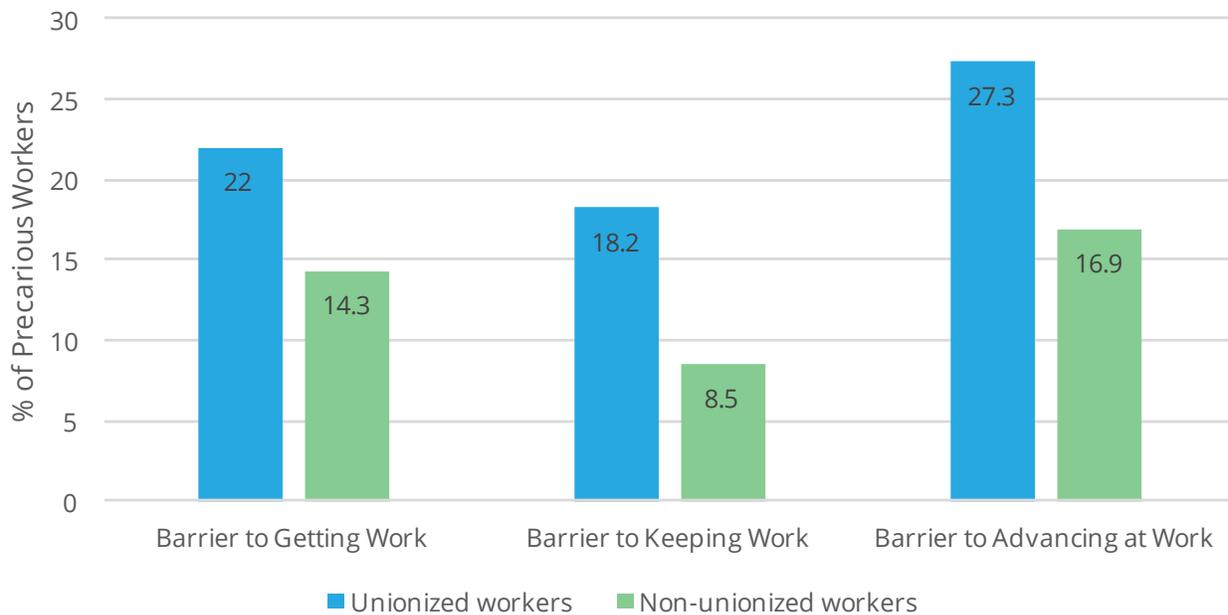
#### 4. HEALTH

Among workers with precarious employment, union status is not associated with self-reported health or mental health. Two-thirds of all workers with precarious employment report very good or excellent mental health and almost two-thirds give similar ratings of their health.

#### 5. WORKPLACE DISCRIMINATION

As shown in Figure 17, our analyses showed counterintuitive findings with regard to workplace discrimination. Unionized workers with precarious employment are more likely to report experiencing workplace discrimination that interferes with their ability to get work, keep work and advance at work compared to their non-unionized counterparts.<sup>21</sup> Research indicates that perception of workplace discrimination can be affected by worker expectations of their environments.<sup>22</sup>

Figure 17. Unionized and Non-Unionized Precarious Workers: Experience of Workplace Discrimination



Source: PEPSO Surveys 2011-12 & 2014. Getting work:  $p < .10$ . Keeping work:  $p < .01$ . Advancing at work:  $p < .05$

21 The survey question did not specify whether the workplace discrimination occurred at their current place of employment, previous place of employment or multiple employment settings. Therefore, it is not possible to ascertain if experiences of discrimination took place in unionized workplaces, non-unionized workplaces or both.

22 Banerjee, R. (2008). An examination of factors affecting perception of workplace discrimination. *Journal of Labor Research*, 29(4): 380-401.

## E. EXAMINING UNION ADVANTAGE AMONG PRECARIOUS WORKERS USING MULTIVARIATE ANALYSES

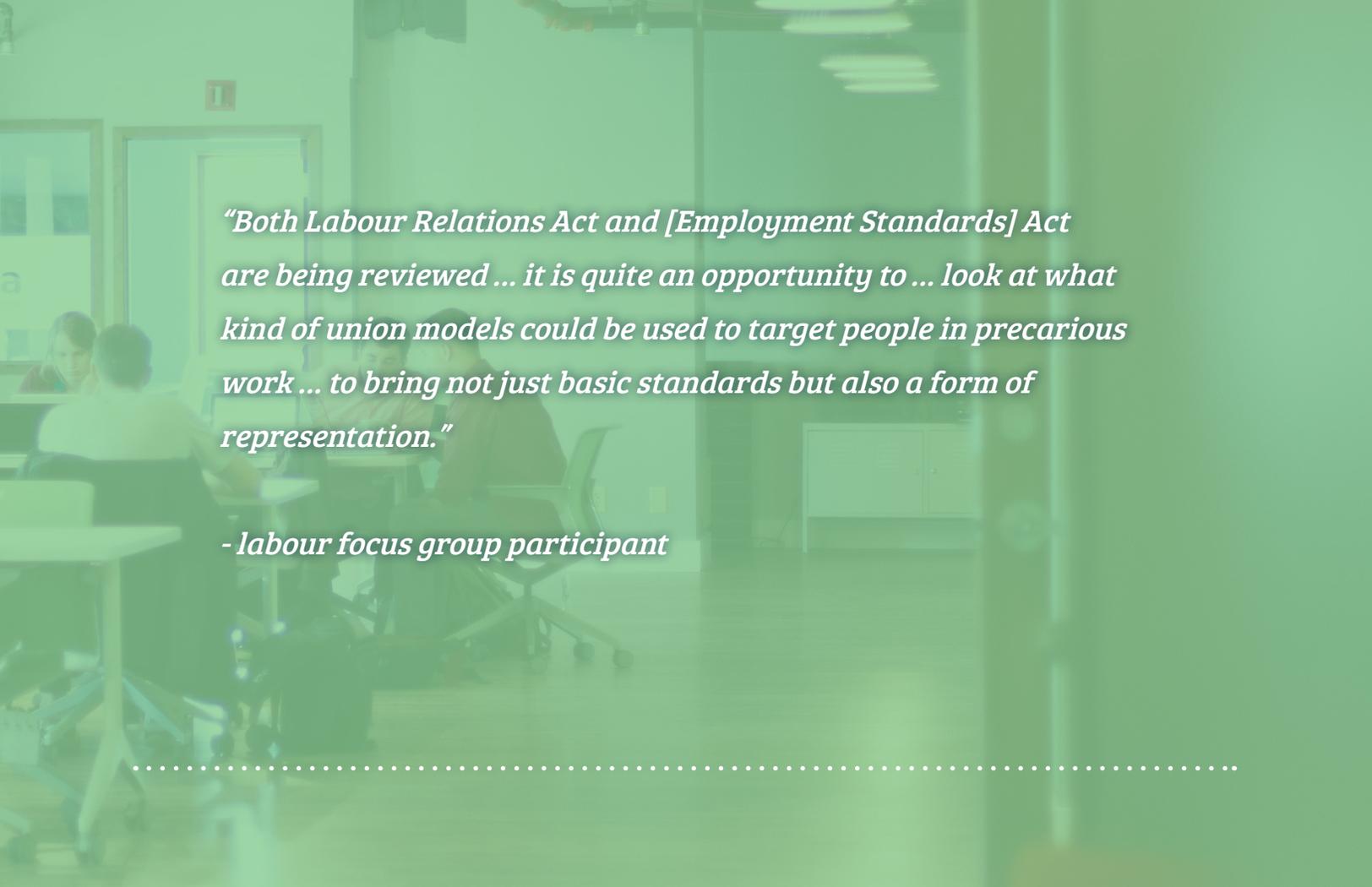
Findings in the previous section demonstrate a clear union advantage with regard to income, income stability, and access to pension, benefits and paid time off. Results regarding household stress and workplace discrimination provide counterintuitive findings.

In this section, we report on results from multivariate analyses. These analyses test

whether unionization is associated with positive workplace benefits and conditions for precarious workers, even after taking into account gender, age, race, immigration status and education level required for the job.

We found that, after taking into account these factors, unionization is still associated with having:

- An individual income over \$40,000 per year
- Employer-provided pension, benefits and paid time off
- Workplace discrimination that presents a barrier to keeping work and advancing at work



*“Both Labour Relations Act and [Employment Standards] Act are being reviewed ... it is quite an opportunity to ... look at what kind of union models could be used to target people in precarious work ... to bring not just basic standards but also a form of representation.”*

*- labour focus group participant*

---

## DISCUSSION

Unions have traditionally played an important role in obtaining better wages and workplace benefits for their members. Union membership is associated with improving job security and providing a means for workers to have a collective voice and exercise their workplace rights. Unions have also been engaged in efforts to advocate for policies that improve working conditions, labour rights and quality of life in communities at large. However, with the rise of precarious jobs over the past three decades, unions are “catching up to deal with the phenomenon of precarious work”.<sup>23</sup>

Unions are concerned about the growth of precarious employment because of its negative effects on its members and workers broadly.

Many of the increasing number of precarious jobs fail to provide employment security, living wages and decent benefits. The nature of precarious employment undermines the capacity of workers to organize. These workers may be in and out of employment frequently, work at multiple locations, work as freelancers with multiple employers, or work through temporary employment agencies. During union drives, they may be especially vulnerable to employers who try to dissuade them from joining a union by threatening their already precarious employment. Fighting precarious work has become a key strategic goal for unions. Findings in this study confirm there is a union advantage in terms of access to standard employment, higher wages, better workplace protections and benefits for workers.

<sup>23</sup> Social Planning Toronto labour focus group, April 5, 2016.



## A. THE UNION ADVANTAGE

### 1. INCOME

---

Our study demonstrates that consistent with existing literature, unionization has a positive impact on incomes. Study data show that unionized workers are less likely to have low incomes than their non-unionized counterparts. This was also found comparing unionized and non-unionized precarious workers. This is consistent with related research where unions are found to raise the relative pay of their members by \$6.57 an hour on average.<sup>24</sup>

In addition, unionized workers are less likely to have varied earnings over the last 12 months. When we compared unionized and non-unionized precarious workers, we found that unionization had a positive impact on income stability as well.

### 2. FORM OF EMPLOYMENT & WORKPLACE BENEFITS AND CONDITIONS

---

According to PEPSO research, the lack of a pension, benefits and paid time off are central characteristics of precarious work.<sup>25</sup> Our study shows that consistent with existing literature, unionization is strongly associated with having workplace pensions, benefits and paid time off. This is true even after taking into account other factors, including gender, age, race, immigration status, and education level required for the job.

According to Jackson, unionized workers are three times more likely to have employer-provided pension plans and two times more likely to have employer-provided medical and dental benefits.<sup>26</sup> Findings in our study confirm that unionization is associated with having access to employer-provided pensions and benefits as well as paid time off. This is also the case for precarious workers where unionization is especially beneficial to accessing an employer-provided pension and benefits.

PEPSO reports have documented the negative impacts of insecure and unstable employment and lack of stable working hours on individuals and households.<sup>27,28</sup> Our findings show that unionization is associated with stable and secure employment and having predictable hours of work.

---

24 Canadian Labour Congress (2014). The Union Advantage for Provincial and Territorial Breakdown: Ontario. Available at: <http://canadianlabour.ca/why-unions/provincial-and-territorial-breakdown/ontario>

25 Lewchuk, W. et al. (2015). The Precarity Penalty: The impact of employment precarity on individuals, households and communities – and what we can do about it. Toronto, Ontario: United Way Toronto & McMaster University.

26 Jackson, A. (2004). Gender Inequality and Precarious Work: Exploring the impact of unions through the gender and work database. Canadian Labour Congress.

27 Lewchuk, W. et al. (2013). It's More than Poverty: Employment precarity and household well-being. Toronto, Ontario: United Way Toronto & McMaster University.

28 Lewchuk, W. et al. (2015). The Precarity Penalty: The impact of employment precarity on individuals, households and communities – and what we can do about it. Toronto, Ontario: United Way Toronto & McMaster University.

---

### 3. INCOME, WORKPLACE AND HOUSEHOLD STRESS

---

Precarious employment has adverse effects on individual and household well-being. PEPSO research has presented evidence that this form of employment is associated with workplace and income stress.<sup>29,30</sup> Comparing unionized and non-unionized workers, we found unionized workers are less likely to experience some income stresses such as concern over inability to keep financial commitments. These findings are consistent with our results showing unionized workers have higher incomes. In contrast, we found unionized workers are slightly more likely than non-unionized workers to experience some household stresses such as anxiety about employment interfering with personal and family life. However, this finding was not statistically significant after demographic factors were taken into account. No statistically significant differences were found between the two groups on feeling angry or depressed as a result of work.

### 4. HEALTH

---

Precarious employment is associated with lower self-reported mental health ratings but had no significant association with self-reported health. Similarly, our analysis showed union coverage is associated with slightly higher self-reported mental health ratings but was not association with self-reported health. In an analysis of collective agreements, researchers have documented the health advantages of union membership such as access to employer-provided coverage for dental, vision, drug and health services, health and safety provisions, and paid sick leave.<sup>31</sup> However our analysis did not demonstrate a connection between unionization and self-reported even after taking into account other important factors such as age.

Few studies have examined the connection between unionization and self-reported health. However, one recent and ground-breaking study conducted by Duke University utilizing a large U.S. dataset demonstrated a connection between unionization and higher self-reported health ratings.<sup>32</sup> This study used a more complex model which took into account a worker's industry and occupation. Limitations of our data prohibited a similar analysis. It is possible that the relationship between union status and self-reported health is more complex and requires a more intricate model for analysis.

29 Lewchuk, W. et al. (2013). *It's More than Poverty: Employment precarity and household well-being*. Toronto, Ontario: United Way Toronto & McMaster University.

30 Lewchuk, W. et al. (2015). *The Precarity Penalty: The impact of employment precarity on individuals, households and communities – and what we can do about it*. Toronto, Ontario: United Way Toronto & McMaster University.

31 Hagedorn, J., Paras, C.A., Greenwich, H. & Hagopian, A. (2016). The role of labor unions in creating working conditions that promote public health. *American Journal of Public Health*, 106: 989-995.

32 Reynolds, M.M. & Brady, D. (2012). Bringing You More Than the Weekend: Union membership and self-rated health in the United States. *Social Forces*, 90(3): 1023-1049.

## 5. WORKPLACE DISCRIMINATION

---

In the PEPSO research, workers with precarious employment are more likely than those with stable and secure employment to report workplace discrimination that acts as a barrier to getting work, keeping work and advancing at work.<sup>33</sup> Our analysis showed curious findings. First, we found unionized and non-unionized workers had similar rates of experiencing workplace discrimination. However, the survey did not explore whether union membership aided workers in getting support and resolving workplace discrimination issues when experienced in a unionized workplace.

Secondly, we found that unionized precarious workers are more likely than their non-unionized counterparts to report workplace discrimination acting as a barrier to getting work, keeping work and advancing at work. Even after controlling for important factors such as gender, age, race and immigration status, unionization is still associated with workplace discrimination that acts as a barrier to keeping work and advancing at work for precarious workers.

It is important to note that the survey did not capture when or where the experience of workplace discrimination took place. It is unclear whether these experiences took place in a unionized workplace, non-unionized workplace or both.

Our findings may be related to differences in the expectations of workers. Research indicates that perception of workplace discrimination can be affected by worker expectations of their environment.<sup>34</sup> Unionized precarious workers may have greater expectations of a discrimination-free workplace than their non-unionized counterparts due to their engagement in a union. These expectations could have an impact on perception of discrimination.

---

33 Lewchuk, W. et al. (2015). *The Precarity Penalty: The impact of employment precarity on individuals, households and communities – and what we can do about it*. Toronto, Ontario: United Way Toronto & McMaster University.

34 Banerjee, R. (2008). An examination of factors affecting perception of workplace discrimination. *Journal of Labor Research*, 29(4): 380-401.

---

## **POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

The findings from this study call attention to the need for public policies that address precarious work and mitigate its adverse effects, and ensure improved access to the protections provided by unionization as well as improved labour standards for all working people.

Both the Labour Relations Act (LRA) and the Employment Standards Act (ESA) play an important role in facilitating workers' self-organizing and providing important workplace protections. As of the publication of this report, the Government of Ontario was considering recommendations from the final report of the Changing Workplaces Review. This review presents an important opportunity for the Province to modernize our labour laws in light of

the growing precariousness of work in Ontario to improve working conditions and act on the rights of Ontario workers.

In this section, we propose a series of policy recommendations that show how different levels of government and community organizations can reduce precarious employment and mitigate its adverse effects. We propose that:

- the Labour Relations Act be reformed to enable workers to organize and get the benefits of unionization as shown in this study
- the Employment Standards Act be changed to provide access to key benefits for workers outside of unions and engaged in precarious work
- systemic barriers in the labour market, such as discrimination, be meaningfully addressed
- community health and settlement supports be enhanced to address health and labour market challenges of precarious workers



## A. ENSURE LABOUR RELATIONS ACT IMPROVES ACCESS TO UNIONIZATION AND PROTECTS WORKERS IN UNIONS WHEN CONTRACTING OUT TAKES PLACE

Consistent with existing research, our findings demonstrate the many advantages of unionization. However, just over one in five workers in Toronto are in unions with little change in the unionization rate over the past 19 years.<sup>35</sup> Data over the past 35 years show a decline in the unionization rate for Canada from 38% to 30.3% and for Ontario from 33.7% to 26.7%.<sup>36,37</sup> For more workers to have the benefits of unionization including protections against precarity, reforms to the Ontario LRA, which guides and regulates various aspects of the unionization process, are needed to facilitate easier access to unionization and collective action.

## 1. UNION CERTIFICATION

The LRA should provide a one-step certification process. Access to a simple certification process is important for workers in precarious employment, as many face difficulty organizing because they work at multiple job sites and may be unable to interact with co-workers due to erratic work schedules. Precarious workers because of their vulnerability to job loss are especially negatively affected by the current two-step certification process (card-based certification and balloted vote). The current process provides added opportunities for employers to attempt to dissuade workers from unionizing, especially those with insecure positions. Academic research has documented a range of anti-certification tactics used by employers that would be mitigated by a simpler process.<sup>38</sup> The LRA needs to ensure that there are strong mechanisms in place to enable workers in precarious jobs to organize if they choose to. This can be achieved through establishing a one-step certification process whereby workers can vote once by signing a union membership card.<sup>39,40</sup>

35 Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, 1997-2006. Accessed through the City of Toronto.

36 *ibid.*

37 Galarneau, D. & Sohn, T. (2013). Long-term trends in unionization. Insights on Canadian Society. Toronto, Ontario: Statistics Canada.

38 Slinn, S. (2007, December 7). Anti-union intimidation is real. National Post, Toronto, Ontario.

39 Fight for \$15 and Fairness (2016). Changing Workplaces Review: A framework for questions outlined in the Changing Workplaces Review - Guide to Consultations. Toronto, Ontario. Available at: <http://15andfairness.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Labour-Law-Review-Template-for-Responses-2015.06.pdf>

40 Ontario Federation of Labour (2015). Preliminary Submission: The Changing Workplaces Review. Available at: <http://ofl.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015.06.17-PreliminarySubmission-LabourLaw.pdf>

## 2. CONTRACTING OUT

Changes should be made to the LRA to ensure that contracting out and subcontracting do not affect workers' access to union protections regarding wages and benefits. When businesses contract out services such as cleaning, food and beverage services, security and personal support work, employees who worked for the unionized company are often called to do the same job for the sub-contractor, which is likely to be non-unionized and provide lower pay and less security.<sup>41</sup> Roche, Block and Abban found that as a result of contracting out cleaning services at Toronto police stations, many workers either lost their jobs or their employment term as permanent changed to part-time with lower pay and reduced workplace benefits.<sup>42</sup> It is important that the LRA ensure that workers' wages and working conditions are not adversely affected by contracting out and subcontracting. One of the ways that the LRA can address this issue is through extending successor rights for workers employed by the company engaging in contracting out.<sup>43</sup>

## B. REFORM EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS ACT TO ENSURE FAIR WORKING CONDITIONS FOR THE MOST VULNERABLE WORKERS

Findings in this report show that unionized workers are much more likely to have an employer-provided pension and benefits compared to non-unionized workers. The percentage of unionized workers with an employer-provided pension and benefits is 1.8 times higher and 1.6 times higher than that of non-unionized workers, respectively. Unions make an even bigger difference for precarious workers. The percentage of unionized precarious workers with a pension and benefits is almost 3 times and 3.4 times higher than that of non-unionized precarious workers, respectively. To protect the most vulnerable workers, access to unionization alone is not a comprehensive protection. Employment Standards legislation and enforcement also need to be strengthened.

41 Social Planning Toronto labour focus group, April 5, 2016

42 Roche, B., Block, S. & Abban, V. (2015). Contracting Out at The City: Effects on workers' health. Toronto, Ontario: Wellesley Institute. Available at: [http://www.wellesleyinstitute.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Contracting-Out-At-The-City\\_Wellesley-Institute\\_2015.pdf](http://www.wellesleyinstitute.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Contracting-Out-At-The-City_Wellesley-Institute_2015.pdf)

43 Ontario Federation of Labour (2015). Preliminary Submission: The Changing Workplaces Review. Available at: <http://ofl.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015.06.17-PreliminarySubmission-LabourLaw.pdf>

## 1. ENFORCE THE EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS ACT

---

An Ontario Ministry of Labour blitz targeting sectors with high precarity found that 78% of workplaces inspected were in violation of the ESA.<sup>44</sup> PEPSO research demonstrates that precarious workers are at greater risk of not being paid by employers for completed work.<sup>45,46</sup> Recent research also shows how employer violations of the ESA impact racialized workers in precarious employment. In an in-depth survey of GTA restaurant workers of Chinese descent, the Metro Toronto Chinese and Southeast Asian Legal Clinic found a significant number of workers were paid less than minimum wage, denied paid time off and worked either long hours or shorter-than-40-hour shifts.<sup>47</sup> It is critical that the provincial government ensure that the ESA is proactively enforced in low-wage, precarious workplaces.

## 2. PAID TIME OFF

---

Paid time off ensures workers can stay home without penalty when they or their family members are ill and do not have to risk their health and the health of their co-workers. It also allows for healthy, balanced lives by providing paid vacation time for workers. However, one of the characteristics of precarious employment is lack of access to paid time off. Unionization is associated with having paid time off, including for precarious workers.

It is critical that the ESA ensure that paid time off is accessible to all workers regardless of their form of employment and union status. The Fight for \$15 and Fairness campaign and Ontario health workers have called for 7 paid sick days to be included in the ESA, along with a minimum of 3 weeks of paid vacation for workers.<sup>48</sup>

---

44 Mojtehedzadeh, S. (2016, January 20). Inspection blitz finds three-quarters of bosses breaking law. Toronto Star. <https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2016/01/20/inspection-blitz-finds-three-quarters-of-bosses-breaking-law.html>

45 Lewchuk, W. et al. (2013). It's More than Poverty: Employment precarity and household well-being. Toronto, Ontario: United Way Toronto & McMaster University.

46 Lewchuk, W. et al. (2015). The Precarity Penalty: The impact of employment precarity on individuals, households and communities – and what we can do about it. Toronto, Ontario: United Way Toronto & McMaster University.

47 Metro Toronto Chinese & Southeast Asian Legal Clinic (2016). Sweet & Sour: The struggle of Chinese restaurant-workers. Toronto, Ontario.

48 Fight for \$15 and Fairness (no date). Health Workers Support Paid Sick Leave. Available at: <http://15andfairness.org/health-care-providers-support-paid-sick-leave/>

---

### 3. FAIR SCHEDULING

---

Uncertainty about work schedules limits workers' ability to spend time with family and friends and plan their lives.<sup>49</sup> Lack of predictable work hours and erratic work schedules are common characteristics of precarious employment.

According to our research, regardless of their collective bargaining status, precarious workers are significantly more likely to have unpredictable hours of work and to work either very few hours per week or to work overtime. At present, the provincial government under the ESA requires employers to pay employees working shifts of less than 3 hours the equivalent of 3 hours at minimum wage or the employee's regular wage for time worked, whichever is the higher amount.<sup>50</sup> However, the "3-hour rule" does not apply to students, employees who regularly work shifts that are three hours or less, and some other exceptional cases. The government should improve upon the existing rule by removing exemptions and expanding the minimum number of hours covered. As well, employers should be required to provide employees with work schedules well in advance of shifts.

### 4. MINIMUM WAGE

---

Our research shows that unionized workers are less likely to earn low wages compared to non-unionized workers. This is also true for unionized precarious workers compared to their non-unionized counterparts. It is essential to ensure that all workers have decent wages. Yet Ontario's current minimum wage leaves full-time, full-year workers below the poverty line.

The Government of Ontario should increase the statutory minimum wage. Currently, there are public efforts to set it above the poverty line at \$15 an hour as called for by the Fight for \$15 and Fairness campaign, unions, worker rights' groups, communities and researchers. Responding to strong public campaigns, many jurisdictions across the United States have increased the minimum wage to \$15 an hour.<sup>51</sup>

---

49 Lewchuk, W. et al. (2015). *The Precarity Penalty: The impact of employment precarity on individuals, households and communities – and what we can do about it*. Toronto, Ontario: United Way Toronto & McMaster University.

50 Ontario Ministry of Labour (2017). *Minimum Wage*. Available at: <https://www.labour.gov.on.ca/english/es/pubs/guide/minwage.php#three>

51 National Employment Law Project (2015). *14 Cities and States Approve \$15 Minimum Wage in 2015*. Available at: <http://www.nelp.org/news-releases/14-cities-states-approved-15-minimum-wage-in-2015/>

## C. IMPROVE ACCESS TO PUBLIC AND COMMUNITY SERVICES FOR WORKERS WITHOUT ACCESS TO BENEFITS

Having insecure work is not only associated with lower wages and unstable income, but also with a host of other challenges for individuals and families, including compromised mental health and experience of depression and social isolation related to work.<sup>52</sup> In the absence of critical employer-provided benefits and pension plans, there is a need for public services and community supports to fill in the gap.

### 1. BENEFITS

We found in our study that unions play an important role in ensuring access to benefits, which are critical to the health and well-being of workers. In the absence of employer-provided prescription drug, vision and dental benefits for a majority of workers, the Government of Ontario and the City of Toronto should fill in this gap by

creating programs to address the need. Such models should explore how workers who hold multiple jobs at one time can still be covered by benefits.<sup>53</sup>

### 2. PENSION

Access to a pension is critical to ensure income security for people in old age. While unionization improves access to pensions, there is a need for a public pension plan to support the majority of workers who do not have a workplace pension plan. In 2016, the federal, provincial and territorial governments reached an agreement to expand the Canada Pension Plan (CPP) from 25% of insurable earnings to 33% and an increase in the maximum annual contribution to CPP, with changes phased in over a 9-year period.<sup>54</sup> This expansion, while not improving benefit levels to the degree recommended by labour advocates, is a critical step toward greater economic security for workers in Canada during their retirement. A continued commitment to expansion of CPP is essential to the well-being of workers in old age.

<sup>52</sup> Lewchuk, W. et al. (2015). *The Precarity Penalty: The impact of employment precarity on individuals, households and communities – and what we can do about it*. Toronto, Ontario: United Way Toronto & McMaster University.

<sup>53</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> Block, S. (2016). *CPP Expansion: A major advance for Canadians*. Toronto, Ontario: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

### 3. COMMUNITY HEALTH SUPPORTS

In the absence of health and income security benefits, precarious workers are more likely to be at risk of compromised health and mental health issues.<sup>55</sup> Community supports play an important role in providing much needed health and mental health services to this group of workers. Previous research conducted by Social Planning Toronto has documented the positive impacts of community services funded by the City of Toronto in improving health and well-being of communities through health promotion, disease and injury prevention, as well as, mental health and addiction programs.<sup>56</sup> Many of these programs target people in low-income neighbourhoods. Further, community health centres funded by the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-term Care provide important “primary health care ... with a specific mandate to focus on the social determinants of health such as income, working conditions, education ...”.<sup>57</sup> Over half of the people served by community health centres

in Ontario are low income including many people who are precariously employed.

Despite evidence that these services have been successful in improving the health and well-being of marginalized communities, they continue to face funding constraints.<sup>58,59</sup> The Government of Ontario and the City of Toronto need to expand these critical services to address lack of access to important health benefits for precarious workers, as well as, those not covered by collective agreements. Due to distinct challenges facing precarious workers, community supports should be more flexible in programming and accessible outside of traditional business hours.

55 Association of Ontario Health Centres (2015). Strengthening Employment Legislation in Ontario: Upstream policies to help promote health and well-being. Toronto, Ontario.

56 Wilson, B. (2014). Building Toronto, Creating Community: The City of Toronto's Investment in Nonprofit Community Services. Toronto, Ontario: Social Planning Toronto. Available at: <https://d3n8a8pro7vhm.cloudfront.net/socialplanningtoronto/pages/400/attachments/original/1471027805/Building-Toronto-Creating-Community-report.pdf?1471027805>

57 Association of Ontario Health Centres (2015). Strengthening Employment Legislation in Ontario: Upstream policies to help promote health and well-being. Toronto, Ontario.

58 Collins, P., Sarah, J. R. & James, R. D. (2014). The Untold Story: Examining Ontario's Community Health Centres' initiatives to address upstream determinants of health. Healthcare Policy, 10(1), pp 14-29. Available at: <http://www.longwoods.com/content/23977>

59 Wilson, B. (2014). Building Toronto, Creating Community: The City of Toronto's Investment in Nonprofit Community Services. Toronto, Ontario: Social Planning Toronto. Available at: <https://d3n8a8pro7vhm.cloudfront.net/socialplanningtoronto/pages/400/attachments/original/1471027805/Building-Toronto-Creating-Community-report.pdf?1471027805>

## ▶ OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE LABOUR MOVEMENT

The labour movement in Toronto has played a significant role in advocating for the rights of workers to have job security, decent wages and benefits, and other important workplace protections. Our research confirms that union membership is a safeguard against precarious employment and that there is union advantage in terms of wages, benefits, pensions, paid time off and stable incomes.

This research recognizes that due to complex labour market challenges, unionization alone cannot mitigate all the negative aspects of precarious work. While the rise of precarious work is a challenging problem that needs to be addressed at a policy level, focus group participants also identified how the labour movement can take measures and adopt initiatives to challenge precarious employment and its negative effects.

### A. LEVERAGE COLLECTIVE BARGAINING IN AN EFFORT TO MINIMIZE PRECARITY

With the rise of precarious employment, there is a clear need for the labour movement to intensify its efforts to strategically target precarious work through organizing initiatives that place a priority on preventing the conversion of standard employment to precarious jobs and improving precarious workers' working conditions and protection of rights.

Unions can use their collective bargaining power to enable precarious workers to join unions. There are several examples of such efforts in North America, Europe and Asia. For example, IndustriALL, a global union representing 50 million workers in 140 countries in the mining, energy and manufacturing sectors, encourages its affiliates to remove barriers in collective agreements that restrict precarious workers' efforts to join unions.<sup>60</sup>

Another strategy to resist precarity is for unions to use their collective bargaining power to demand certain benefits and protections for precarious workers. In Toronto, in their 2016 round of contract negotiations, the Toronto Public

<sup>60</sup> IndustriALL Global Union (2016). Four Years of IndustriALL Action to Stop Precarious Employment. Available at: <http://www.industriall-union.org/four-years-of-industriall-action-to-stop-precarious-work>

Library Workers Union (TPLW), representing over 2,000 workers, made job security one of its key negotiation terms. Further, the Hospital Employees Union (HEU) in British Columbia unionized over 3,000 newly privatized support service workers and successfully negotiated wage increases from \$8 to \$13 an hour in two rounds of collective bargaining.<sup>61</sup> Recently, Workers United Canada Council also ran a successful campaign to organize 650 personal trainers at Goodlife Fitness, a major private-sector gym in Toronto.<sup>62</sup>

## B. ORGANIZE BY SECTOR

Focus group participants agreed that temporary help agencies, contracting out and sub-contracting are major drivers of precarious work. One of the ways that precarious work can be reduced is through sectoral bargaining in addition to organizing specific workplaces.

Unions can consider organizing precarious workers by negotiating sectoral collective agreements covering workers in specific sectors

or workplaces. In Denmark, Belgium and Germany, unions in the industrial production and construction sectors have negotiated agreements and protocols that cover temporary agency workers in sector-specific collective agreements.<sup>63</sup> In the United States, the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) launched Justice for Janitors campaigns in major cities to persuade cleaning contractors to enter into a collective bargaining agreement covering over 5,000 janitors.<sup>64</sup> SEIU has also successfully organized workers in traditionally underrepresented sectors, such as homecare workers and hospital workers. The union is currently engaged in organizing efforts targeting the fast food industry through its fight for a \$15 minimum wage and the right to have a union.

In the current labour market where half of jobs are precarious and it is increasingly difficult to organize vulnerable workers who hold multiple jobs at various workplaces, unions have good reason to organize workers by specific sectors and negotiate sectoral collective agreements.

61 Chun (2012) as cited in Vosko, L.F., Thomas, M., Hick, A. & Chun, J.J. (2013). Organizing Precariously-Employed Workers in Canada. Unpublished working paper for EOIW.

62 Mojtehedzadeh, S. (2016, July 9). Toronto GoodLife trainers vote for union muscle. Toronto Star. Available at: <https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2016/07/09/toronto-goodlife-trainers-vote-for-union-muscle.html>

63 IndustriALL Global Union (2016). Four Years of IndustriALL Action to Stop Precarious Employment. Available at: <http://www.industriall-union.org/four-years-of-industriall-action-to-stop-precarious-work>

64 Ebisui, M. (2012). Non-Standard Workers: Good practices of social dialogue and collective bargaining. Industrial and Employment Relations Department, Working Paper # 36. Geneva, Switzerland: International Labour Office.

## C. ADDRESS TIERED COLLECTIVE AGREEMENTS

In order for unions to ensure that the next generation of workers as well as recent immigrants, many of whom are from racialized groups, receive the same benefits and protections under collective agreements, unions should reject two-tier provisions in contracts that provide new hires with fewer benefits than other workers. Unions recognize that two-tiered contracts erode solidarity among workers, reducing their power to negotiate better deals, and instead deliver lower wages and poorer working conditions and protections for workers in the long term.<sup>65</sup> Recommendations for addressing two-tiered bargaining include educating workers on the costs of two-tiered contracts, engaging governments and public sector employers about fair treatment of public sector workers, and finding ways to address cost issues including, in some circumstances, considering accepting lower across the board wage increases to prevent a two-tiered agreement.

## D. UNION RENEWAL: SUPPORT A STRONG SOCIAL SAFETY NET

Our recommendations echo some of the calls for union renewal at the turn of the century.<sup>66,67</sup> With a steady decline of union density in the private sector, falling living standards, downward pressure on wages and the rise of employment precarity, the labour movement in Canada has embarked on union renewal processes to build voice for all workers. Central to this renewal should be improving working and living conditions for workers in precarious employment through supporting a solid social safety net.

Our research reveals that as long as precarity exists, many workers are left out in terms of access to decent wages and important benefits. For many vulnerable workers, access to public services and government transfers such as social assistance, Employment Insurance, subsidized child care, social housing, public pensions and employment support in old age is critical to compensate for their lack of decent wages and workplace benefits. Our social safety net that was woven when full-time, permanent jobs with benefits were the norm is no longer adequately responsive to the needs of an increasingly low-wage, insecure labour force. The labour movement needs to continue to advocate for a stronger social safety net as better supports for vulnerable workers can mitigate the negative impacts of precarious work.

65 CUPE (2014). Two-Tiered Bargaining: How to recognize it and reject it. Ottawa, Ontario.

66 Kumar, P. (2008). Whither Unionism: Current state and future prospects of union renewal in Canada. Queen's University IRC Discussion Paper 2008-04. Kingston, Ontario: Queen's University.

67 Foley, J.R. & Baker, P.L. (Eds.). (2009). Unions, Equity, and the Path to Renewal. Vancouver, BC: UBC Press.



## REFERENCES

- Association of Ontario Health Centres (2015). Strengthening Employment Legislation in Ontario: Upstream policies to help promote health and well-being. Toronto, Ontario.
- Banerjee, R. (2008). An examination of factors affecting perception of workplace discrimination. *Journal of Labor Research*, 29(4): 380-401.
- Block, S. (2016). CPP Expansion: A major advance for Canadians. Toronto, Ontario: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.
- Canadian Labour Congress (2014). The Union Advantage for Provincial and Territorial Breakdown: Ontario. Available at: <http://canadianlabour.ca/why-unions/provincial-and-territorial-breakdown/ontario>
- Collins, P., Sarah, J. R. & James, R. D. (2014). The Untold Story: Examining Ontario's Community Health Centres' initiatives to address upstream determinants of health. *Healthcare Policy*, 10(1): 14-29. Available at: <http://www.longwoods.com/content/23977>
- CUPE (2014). Two-Tiered Bargaining: How to recognize it and reject it. Ottawa, Ontario.
- Ebisui, M. (2012). Non-Standard Workers: Good practices of social dialogue and collective bargaining. Industrial and Employment Relations Department, Working Paper # 36. Geneva, Switzerland: International Labour Office.
- Fight for \$15 and Fairness (2016). Changing Workplaces Review: A framework for questions outlined in the Changing Workplaces Review - Guide to Consultations. Toronto, Ontario. Available at: <http://15andfairness.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Labour-Law-Review-Template-for-Responses-2015.06.pdf>
- Fight for \$15 and Fairness (no date). Health Workers Support Paid Sick Leave. Available at: <http://15andfairness.org/health-care-providers-support-paid-sick-leave/>
- Foley, J.R. & Baker, P.L. (Eds.). (2009). Unions, Equity, and the Path to Renewal. Vancouver, BC: UBC Press.
- Galarneau, D. & Sohn, T. (2013). Long-term trends in unionization. Insights on Canadian Society. Toronto, Ontario: Statistics Canada.
- Hagedorn, J., Paras, C.A., Greenwich, H. & Hagopian, A. (2016). The role of labor unions in creating working conditions that promote public health. *American Journal of Public Health*, 106: 989-995.
- IndustriALL Global Union (2016). Four Years of IndustriALL Action to Stop Precarious Employment. Available at: <http://www.industriall-union.org/four-years-of-industriall-action-to-stop-precarious-work>
- Jackson, A. (2004). Gender Inequality and Precarious Work: Exploring the impact of unions through the gender and work database. Canadian Labour Congress.
- Jackson, A. (2003). In Solidarity: The union advantage. Ottawa, Ontario: Canadian Labour Congress.
- Kumar, P. (2008). Whither Unionism: Current state and future prospects of union renewal in Canada. Queen's University IRC Discussion Paper 2008-04. Kingston, Ontario: Queen's University.
- Lewchuk, W. et al. (2015). The Precarity Penalty: The impact of employment precarity on individuals, households and communities – and what we can do about it. Toronto, Ontario: United Way Toronto & McMaster University.
- Lewchuk, W. et al. (2013). It's More than Poverty: Employment precarity and household well-being. Toronto, Ontario: United Way Toronto & McMaster University.
- Metro Toronto Chinese & Southeast Asian Legal Clinic (2016). Sweet & Sour: The struggle of Chinese restaurant-workers. Toronto, Ontario.
- Mojtehedzadeh, S. (2016, January 20). Inspection blitz finds three-quarters of bosses breaking law. *Toronto Star*. <https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2016/01/20/inspection-blitz-finds-three-quarters-of-bosses-breaking-law.html>
- Mojtehedzadeh, S. (2016, July 9). Toronto GoodLife trainers vote for union muscle. *Toronto Star*. Available at: <https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2016/07/09/toronto-goodlife-trainers-vote-for-union-muscle.html>
- National Employment Law Project (2015). 14 Cities and States Approve \$15 Minimum Wage in 2015. Available at: <http://www.nelp.org/news-releases/14-cities-states-approved-15-minimum-wage-in-2015/>
- Ontario Federation of Labour (2015). Preliminary Submission: The Changing Workplaces Review. Available at: <http://ofl.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015.06.17-PreliminarySubmission-LabourLaw.pdf>
- Ontario Ministry of Labour (2017). Minimum Wage. Available at: <https://www.labour.gov.on.ca/english/es/pubs/guide/minwage.php#three>
- Reynolds, M.M. & Brady, D. (2012). Bringing You More Than the Weekend: Social membership and self-rated health in the United States. *Social Forces*, 90(3): 1023-1049.
- Roche, B., Block, S. & Abban, V. (2015). Contracting Out at The City: Effects on workers' health. Toronto, Ontario: Wellesley Institute. Available at: [http://www.wellesleyinstitute.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Contracting-Out-At-The-City\\_Wellesley-Institute\\_2015.pdf](http://www.wellesleyinstitute.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Contracting-Out-At-The-City_Wellesley-Institute_2015.pdf)
- Slinn, S. (2007, December 7). Anti-union intimidation is real. *National Post*, Toronto, Ontario.
- Sran, G., Lynk, M., Clancy, J. & Fudge, D. (2013). Unions Matter: How the ability of labour unions to reduce income inequality and influence public policy has been affected by regressive labour laws. Ottawa, Ontario: Canadian Foundation for Labour Rights.
- Vosko, L.F., Thomas, M., Hick, A. & Chun, J.J. (2013). Organizing Precariously-Employed Workers in Canada. Unpublished working paper for EOIW.
- Wilson, B. (2014). Building Toronto, Creating Community: The City of Toronto's investment in nonprofit community Services. Toronto, Ontario: Social Planning Toronto. Available at: <https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/socialplanningtoronto/pages/400/attachments/original/1471027805/Building-Toronto-Creating-Community-report.pdf?1471027805>

