

The Dynamics of Employment Precarity in a Comparative Perspective:

Labour Market Trajectories and Their Determinants in Poland and the UK.

Anna Kiersztyn

*Faculty of Sociology,
University of Warsaw*
chaber@is.uw.edu.pl

Remigiusz Żulicki

*Institute of Philosophy and Sociology
Polish Academy of Sciences*
remigiusz.zulicki@ifispan.edu.pl



Dynamics of youth employment precarity: Drivers, trajectories, and outcomes in a cross-national perspective

Project funded by the Polish National Science Centre, grant no. 2018/31/B/HS6/02043

Precarious employment

While important subject of study, especially in the context of youth transitions...

No single definition; the literature (e.g., Rodgers, Vosko, Kalleberg & others) points to two main dimensions:

- (a) lack of access to stable, high quality employment,**
resulting in
- (b) economic insecurity.**

Conceptual issues: lack of access to secure employment need not always entail economic insecurity. Subjective insecurity need not always reflect the objective likelihood of job / income loss (e.g., Kiersztyn 2017)

– problems with operationalization.

Fixed-term jobs and precarity

Many studies of individual level relationships which focus on objective aspects of precarity use a single indicator of insecure employment: temporary status.

- Rationale: research showing that in many countries fixed-term employment tends to be generally „worse” than regular employment
- Cros-national studies typically use EU-SILC / LFS / ESS / EWCS data, which all include a ‘harmonized’ dummy indicator of ‘*temporariness*’ of jobs (OECD 2002; Hipp et al. 2015; Vossemer et al. 2018; Högberg et al. 2019).

This is problematic -

While explaining ‘*temporariness*’ and its consequences by pointing to policy and regulatory context, these studies focus on an indicator which is itself affected by this context (in terms of both survey questions and what they actually capture).

Alternative approach

Developed within the **project “Dynamics of youth employment precarity: drivers, trajectories, and outcomes in a cross-national perspective”** (CNB-Young; <https://crossnationalbiographies.edu.pl/en/>), which harmonizes longitudinal data from 4 panel surveys: POLPAN (Poland), UKHLS (UK), SOEP (Germany), NLSY (USA) to offer a comparative view of precarious work from a life-course perspective.

Precarity is conceptualized as a specific career pattern, observed over several years, characterized by frequent job and employer changes and recurrent spells of joblessness coupled with low and / or unstable wages.

- improved cross-country comparability (focus on “universal” events instead of country-specific employment regulations)
- a sequence-based approach to account for possible “stepping-stones”
- Incorporates economic insecurity (not only job stability) present in the notion of employment precarity

Goal of this study

To compare the level and determinants of precarity in both countries.

Hypotheses (based on country differences described in the literature):

UK – liberal labour market - higher occupational and job mobility, lower educational specificity, fewer negative effects of temp jobs

Poland – segmented labour market – lower mobility, but education does not ensure smooth passage to employment, fixed-term and civil law contracts associated with lower quality of employment

- H1.** Precarity in the UK is not well reflected in the standard fixed-term employment indicator (as opposed to Poland).
- H2.** Association between temporary / non-standard employment and precarious careers is stronger in Poland than in the UK.
- H3.** Initial occupational status is a stronger determinant of precarity in Poland than in UK.
- H4.** Job experiences while still in education protect against precarity in both countries

The data

Source of data: **Polish Panel Survey POLPAN** (<http://polpan.org/en/>), waves 2008, 2013, 2018 (surveys include detailed retrospective occupational history questions covering all jobs held by respondents since start of career)

UK Household Panel Survey „Understanding Society”, waves 1-10 (2009-2019).

Data on employment sequences for UKHLS respondents: L. Wright (2020). *Producing working-life histories in the BHPS and UKHLS 2017-2020*. [Data Collection]. Colchester, Essex: UK Data Service. 10.5255/UKDA-SN-854327.

Sample: 15 birth cohorts (1985-1997), whose careers were observed over a period of at least 3 or 5 years since the end of education and who had at least one job during the observation period.

- **in Poland, N=562 and 510 for 3-year and 5-year sequences**, respectively
- **in the UK, N=2,945 for 3-year and 1,822 for 5-year sequences**

(Timing of graduation: 2000-2015 for Poland, 2009-2017 for the UK).

Precarious sequences (a preliminary measure)

Criteria (both have to be met):

- 1) Average duration of a single job spell no longer than 12 months** (captures either recurrent employer changes or short lived jobs with periods of unemployment, or prolonged joblessness)
- 2) Average income from work throughout the sequence*** (corrected for inflation) **below the EU-SILC at risk of poverty line** (60% median income) for 2018.
 - Observed wages are weighted by the share of time spent in employment in a given 3 or 5 year period of observation – this offers a better reflection of economic insecurity among those who experience short job spells.

Note: in both UKHLS and POLPAN, wages are only measured at the time of the survey, not for jobs between waves!

Precarity in the sample

	<i>3 year sequences</i>	<i>N obs.</i>	<i>5 year sequences</i>	<i>N obs.</i>	<i>LFS temp employment</i>
Poland (corrected*)	23.5%	562	19.6%	510	24.3%
UK	21.8%	2,945	15.3%	1,822	5.5%

* Correction necessary due to survey design – only current income reported once every 5 years – leads to bias: underrepresentation of those with breaks in employment among those for whom income data are available. A better estimate is offered by imputing low work income based on number of months worked.

(Source: POLPAN, UKHLS - own calculations, Eurostat 2018)

Explaining precarious sequences

Method: binary logistic regressions separately for both countries, for 3- and 5 year sequences. **Dependent variable:** precarity (corrected indicator for Poland, but with sensitivity analyses using indicator without imputations).

Independent variables:

Any work before finished education,

Occupational status in first job (ISEI 2008),

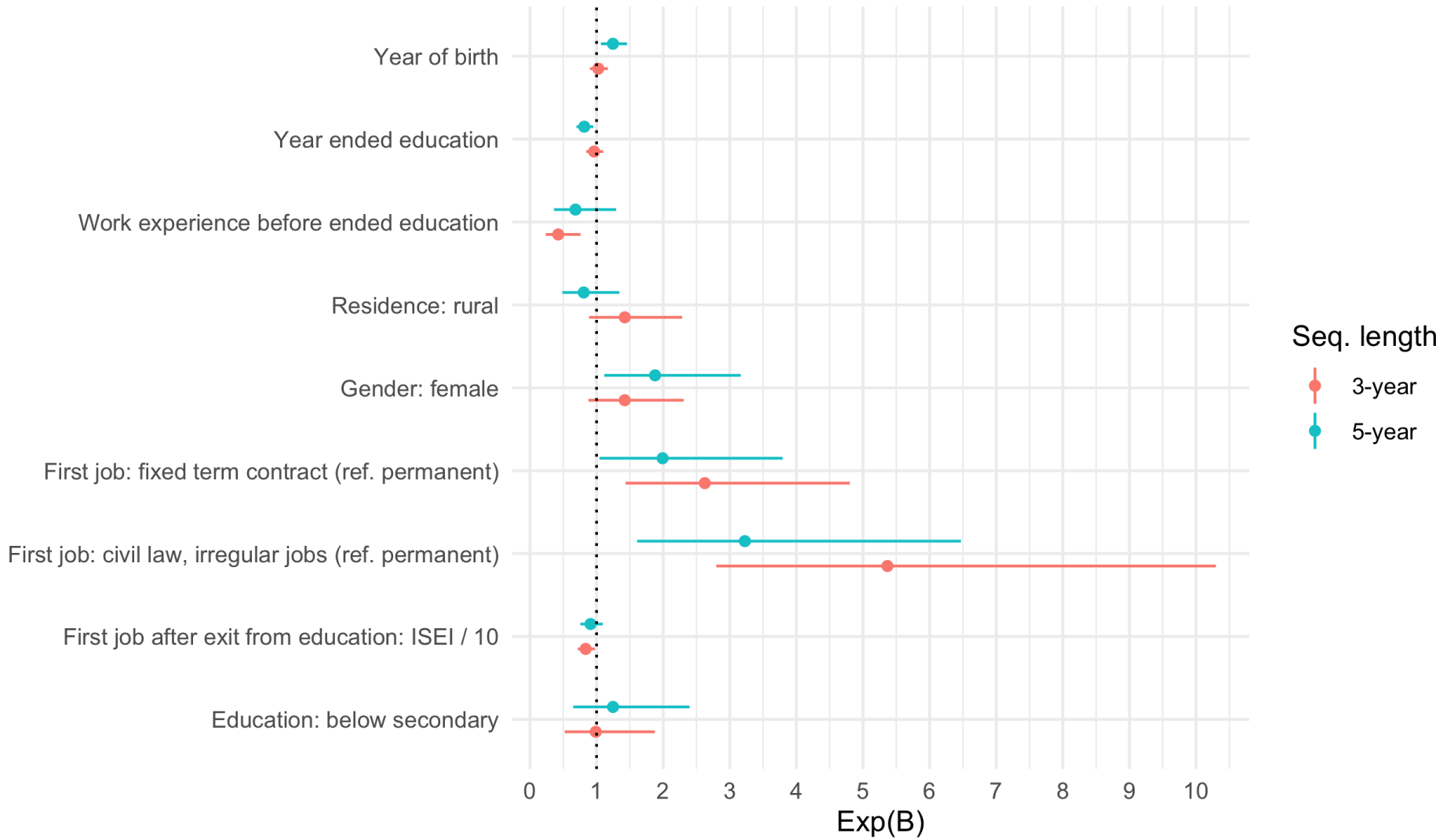
Type of employment (country-specific):

- a) Poland: based on type of contract: open-ended employment (ref.), fixed-term employment, other (civil law jobs, unregistered / odd jobs).
- b) UK: 2 variables: type of non-permanent job and employment status
 - Permanent employment (ref.) vs fixed-term vs seasonal / casual work
 - Full-time employment (ref.) vs part-time (< 35 hrs) vs self-employment

Controls: gender, year of birth, education, size of residence, born in the UK (UK only), year ended education (period effects).

Results

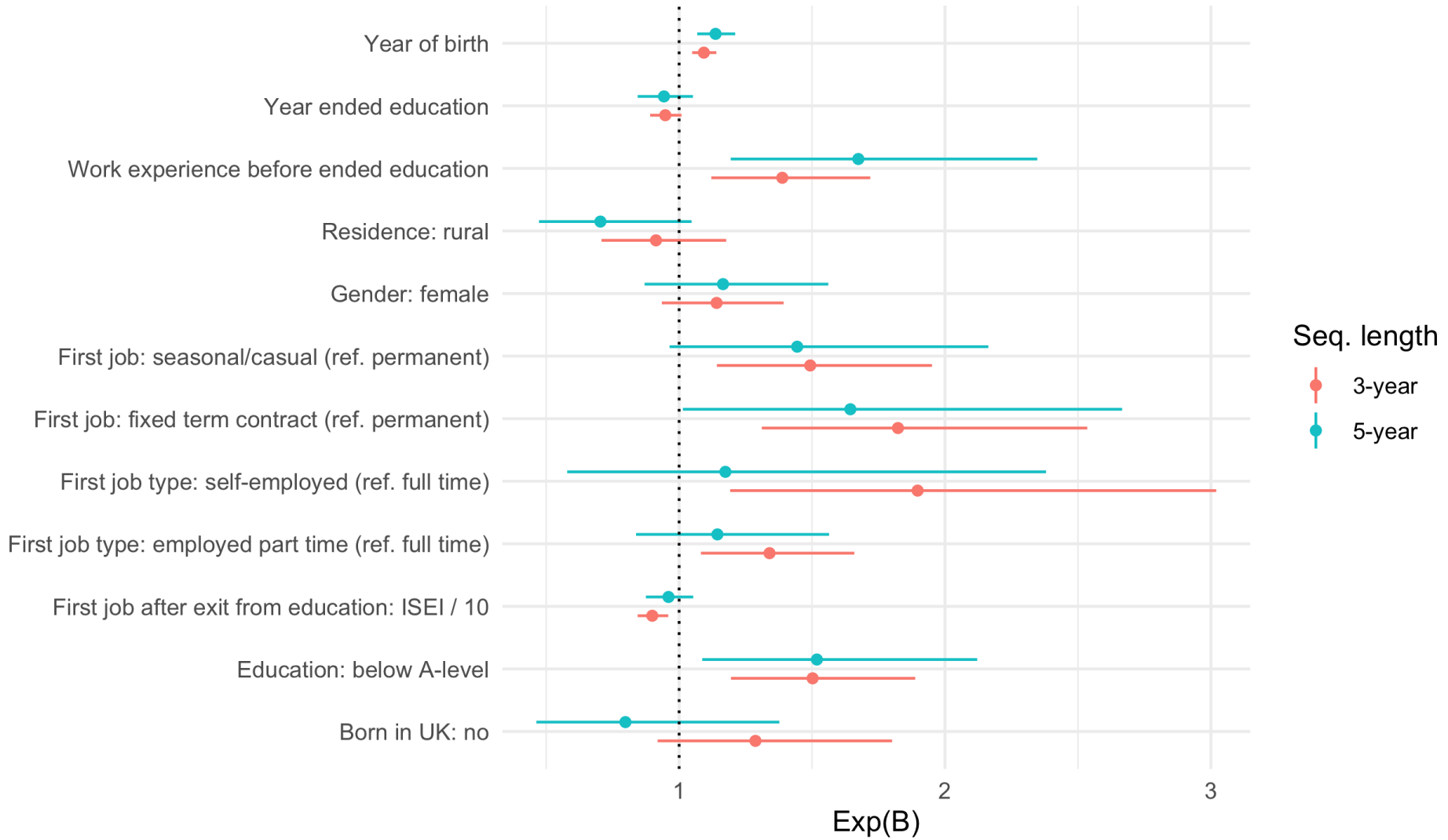
Poland, dependent variable: own precarity indicator



Logistic regression, own calculations, POLPAN data 2008, 2013, 2018

Results

UK, dependent variable: own precarity indicator



Logistic regression, own calculations, UKHLS data W1-10

Conclusions

Our precarity measure appears to be better at capturing employment hardships in the UK, compared to the standard „temporary work” indicator.

This measure points to a significant level of precarity among UK youth – consistent with H1 and contrary to the expectation that employment insecurity is much less problematic in liberal regimes compared to segmented labour markets such as Poland.

As expected (H2), type of employment (contract) following graduation appears to be a stronger determinant of later precarity in Poland (though also significant in the UK).

Job experiences while in education (H4): protection against precarity in Poland, indicator of socio-economic disadvantage in the UK? – further research needed. H3 and H4 only partially confirmed.

In both countries, models for 5-year sequences with less explanatory power – significance of life-course developments after graduation (further training, family trajectories,?)

Thanks for watching!

This is work in progress, please do not cite or quote. Any questions, comments or suggestions are most welcome. You may also contact us by email: chaber@is.uw.edu.pl or remigiusz.zulicki@ifispan.edu.pl



Dynamics of youth employment precarity: Drivers, trajectories, and outcomes in a cross-national perspective (CNB-Young)

Appendix 1:

Questions on fixed-term / non-standard employment in POLPAN and UKHLS

POLPAN 2018

- What type of contract did you have in your job [Options include: Employment contract (fixed-term / open ended and full-time / part-time) / civil law agreements / apprenticeship / managerial contract / self-employment / without a written contract / other]
- Were there any changes in your contractual arrangement while you were in this job [Yes -> write down the nature and timing of change(s) / No]

UKHLS Understanding Society 2017

- Leaving aside your own personal intentions and circumstances, is your job: [1] A permanent job? Or [2] is there some way that it is not permanent?
- In what way is the job not permanent, is it... [1 Seasonal work; 2 Done under contract for a fixed period or a fixed task; 3 Agency temping; 4 Casual type of work; Or is there some other way that it is not permanent? -> In what way is the job not permanent?

Appendix 2: POLPAN data

The focus is on the type of labour contract.

Non-standard contracts associated with precarity:

- Fixed-term employment contracts (incl. contract for a probation period & replacement employment contract), either full time or part time.
- Civil law agreements: contracts of mandate or contracts for a specific task (much less legal protection for workers)

More information on the Polish Panel Survey and data access:

Tomescu-Dubrow, Irina, Kazimierz M. Slomczynski, Zbigniew Sawiński, Anna Kiersztyn, Krystyna Janicka, Danuta Życzyńska-Ciołek, Ilona Wysmułek, and Michał Kotnarowski. „The Polish Panel Survey, POLPAN.” *European Sociological Review*, 2021, jcab017, <https://doi.org/10.1093/esr/jcab017>.

Survey website: <http://polpan.org/en/>