



Job precariousness in journalism: dimensions and predicting factors

Precariedad en el empleo periodístico: dimensiones y factores predictores

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: The concept of job precariousness has been used mainly since the 1980s to talk about the international phenomenon of job deterioration characterized mainly by the instability and social insecurity of employment and the labor vulnerability of the worker. There is a consensus in the literature about the multidimensional and transversal nature of precarious work. The following four key components have been considered: temporal, organizational, economic and social. Different trends in working conditions have led to the claim that employment in journalism is becoming more precarious. **Methodology:** In order to find out the level of job precariousness and its dimensions in journalistic employment and to understand what sociodemographic, labor and organizational factors predict it, the authors carried out Kruskal-Wallis tests and an ordinal logistic regression analysis on data from the Worlds of Journalism Study-3 survey in Mexico. **Results:** For the most part, most of the journalists were at a medium level of precariousness. The most common dimension

of precariousness was the organizational one, indicated by a workload that was either too low or too high. **Discussion and conclusions:** The atypical and informal work modalities undertaken by the media to reduce payroll expenses translate into higher levels of precarious work for journalists. Being a woman, doing freelance work, and working in a digital or local medium are factors that are related to higher levels of precariousness.

Keywords: Precarious work; Working conditions; Journalism; Journalists; News media.

RESUMEN

Introducción: El concepto de precariedad laboral se ha utilizado principalmente para analizar el fenómeno internacional de deterioro del empleo caracterizado principalmente por la inestabilidad e inseguridad social del empleo y la vulnerabilidad laboral de la persona trabajadora. Hay consenso en la literatura acerca del carácter multidimensional y transversal de la precariedad laboral. Se han considerado cuatro componentes clave de esta: el temporal, organizacional, económico y social. Distintas tendencias en las condiciones laborales han llevado a sostener que está teniendo lugar un proceso de precarización del empleo periodístico. **Metodología:** Para conocer el nivel de precariedad laboral y de sus dimensiones en el empleo periodístico y saber qué factores sociodemográficos, laborales y organizacionales las predicen se realizaron pruebas Kruskal-Wallis y un análisis de regresión logística ordinal a datos provenientes de la encuesta Worlds of Journalism Study-3 aplicada en México. **Resultados:** La mayor parte de las personas periodistas se ubicó en un nivel de precariedad media. La dimensión de precariedad más registrada fue la organizacional, indicada a partir de una carga de trabajo o demasiado baja o demasiada alta. **Discusión y conclusiones:** Las modalidades de trabajo atípicas e informales emprendidas por los medios para reducir gastos de nómina se traducen en mayores niveles de precariedad laboral para las y los periodistas. Ser mujer, hacer trabajo *freelance* y trabajar en un medio digital o local son factores que se relacionan con los niveles más altos de precariedad.

Palabras clave: Precariedad laboral; Condiciones de trabajo; Periodismo; Periodistas; Medios de comunicación informativos.

1. Introduction

The concept of job precariousness has been used to analyze the cross-sectional, international and multidimensional phenomenon of precarious employment, characterized by the social instability and frailty of employment and the labor vulnerability of workers (Guadarrama et al., 2012; Mora, 2012; Porta et al., 2015). Job precariousness has grown along with the neoliberal policies adopted by Latin American countries over the last decades (Bayón, 2006; Mora, 2005). Therefore, it is not a phenomenon exclusive to one industry or type of employment.

The perception of uncertainty in the face of the socioeconomic phenomena and technological progress that have impacted the media industry in the new century has motivated the study of the job precariousness of journalists. Those impacts have resulted in the closure or digital migration of news outlets and mass dismissals. These conditions have piqued the interest of journalism scholars in the employment aspect of their profession (Reyna, 2023). The tendency towards job precariousness is one of the characteristics of journalism in Latin America. Between the years 2007 and 2017, the region experienced an increase in work flexibility, instability and multiple job holding¹, as well as a decrease in journalists' average age (Blanco-Herrero et al., 2020).

The aim of this study is to analyze job precariousness and its dimensions in journalism and to determine what social, demographic, organizational and labor factors can predict this tendency. In order to achieve this, the authors analyzed data from the third international survey for journalists Worlds of Journalism Study (WJS-3 hereafter), conducted between 2021 and 2023 in Mexico (Rodelo et al., 2023). The results revealed the main dimensions of job precariousness that affect journalism in Mexico and allowed the authors to identify the profiles of journalists most associated with those precarious jobs.

¹ This is also referred to as moonlighting and hustling in the journalism studies literature published in the English language.

"That the percentage of people afraid of losing their job (53%) was higher than the percentage of people without a stable or full-time job (26%)."

The authors selected Mexico as a case study for three main reasons. First, this is a big and heterogeneous country and analyzing it could reveal patterns that other places might reproduce. Second, during the WJS-3 survey, national teams used slightly different sampling and data collection methods, which could compromise the compared analysis of the global data base. These reasons justify the existence of studies that are focused on a single case rich in information and with regional variations. Finally, by analyzing journalism from a

global perspective, the authors can consider elements that comparative studies often ignore, that play a key role in phenomena within a specific context (Rodelo, 2023; Waisbord, 2013). Thus, the Mexican case combines the dynamics of restructuration, digital convergence, and precarization as a consequence of changes in the national economic model, with particular characteristics given the structural conditions in which Mexican journalism has developed (Rodelo, 2023). These conditions explain why this sector has one of the lowest union affiliation rates and one of the highest multiple job holding rates (paid activities beside workers' primary job) (Blanco-Herrero et al., 2020; Rodelo et al., 2023).

This study makes three contributions to the literature. First, it offers a method to operationalize the job precariousness of journalists that is based on existing literature on the matter and data from the WJS-3 survey. Second, this analysis serves as a first step in the discussion about the ways in which the organization of journalism is being restructured to explore the role of sociodemographic, organizational, and employment conditions. Third, this study intends to fill a gap in the literature since there are few studies based on systematic evidence about the role of predicting factors in the job precariousness of journalists. These tools will prove valuable when detecting the conditions predicting precariousness. The government, academia, and civil society may use these elements to prioritize assistance for those journalists with a higher tendency towards job precariousness.

1.1. The concept of job precariousness and its components

The use of the term *job precariousness* increased because it was necessary to analyze the employment transformations Europe went through during the 1980s (Nicolás, 2017; Rodgers, 1989). After a brief prosperous period (a few decades) in which waged labor became the basic frame of the "modern waged society" (Castel, 2003, p. xiv), workers began to experience a growing vulnerability, uncertainty, informal employment, and poor wages (Rodgers, 1989). Though poverty and bad working conditions have always existed in European countries as well as in less developed regions, the aforementioned tendencies were thought to produce an increase in "atypical" jobs, that is to say, marginalized, temporary, and non-permanent occupations. The latter are excluded from the stable working conditions that constitute the basic model and are controlled by the state (Castel, 2003; De Castro, 2019; Mora, 2005; Nicolás, 2017; Rodgers, 1989).

Job precariousness is not unique to any one country, region, economic sector, or social group. In Latin America, comparative studies in Mexico and Argentina show a process of social integration during the period of import-substitution industrialization. Thanks to this process, the offer of social services and formal employment increased, and social inequality and poverty decreased (Bayón, 2006). According to Bayón (2006) the neoliberal model, applied in Latin America afterwards, broke the previous process of social integration by dismantling safety net mechanisms such as wage protection and access to education. For this reason, job precariousness has been related to the neoliberal economic model and to globalization (Bayón, 2006; Mora, 2005), associated with the Washington Consensus in 1989 that included the privatization of state-owned companies, the deregulation of financial markets, and a growing flexibilization of work. These conditions have created an "exclusion-inclusion dual heterogeneous socioproductive system" (Blanco and Ruiz, 2022, p. 34). On the one hand, this system includes a small, dynamic segment of big companies with a demand for specialized workers with better salaries, but under flexibilization, outsourcing, high rotation, and mass dismissals. On the other hand, the system has a large segment of low-productivity micro and small enterprises that offer underpaid jobs (Blanco and Ruiz, 2022).

Recent studies confirm an increase in job precariousness (International Labour Organization, 2012; Pérez and Ceballos, 2017). Similarly, job precariousness has been normalized, institutionalized, and linked to work flexibility (De Castro, 2019). The latter has comprised various cost-cutting strategies that companies have devised in search of higher incomes, capital accumulation, and competitiveness. For companies, payrolls and workers' benefits are variables they can manage in order to increase their profit (Mora, 2005). This way, work relations, which should be regulated and monitored by the state, are now under the employers' control.

1.1.1. Components of job precariousness

Caire (in Nicolás, 2017) established an initial definition of precariousness based on the characteristics of the contract, mainly the work period. Job precariousness is not only related to low wages; on the contrary, it is a multidimensional, progressive, and hard-to-measure phenomenon (Guadarrama et al., 2012; Mora, 2012) that affects not only workers but also their entire family and social lives (Mora, 2005).

Thereby, job precariousness has several components. The work of Rodgers (1989) built the foundations to identify the following key aspects:

- (1) temporal (degree of certainty about the stability of the job; it is related to the contract and the work period);
- (2) organizational (collective and individual control of workers over the job, working conditions, time, shifts, intensity, payment conditions);
- (3) economic (adequate payment and salary progression); and
- (4) social (legal or customary protection against unfair dismissals, discrimination and unacceptable working conditions, and social protection).

Later on, Guadarrama et al. (2012) retained these elements and insisted on taking subjectivity—that is, the opinions, experiences, and interpretations that people have regarding precariousness—into account. Subjective components would be useful to define precariousness and to understand the practices that respond to this phenomenon (Guadarrama et al., 2012).

1.2. Dimensions of precariousness in journalism

Historic conditions in the development of journalism during the 20th century have shaped the profession in the region. Some of these conditions are: the relationship journalism has maintained with state and economic power circles; the vulnerability of journalists and media outlets with respect to attacks from powerful figures; and the negative effects of the progressive global deprecation of the journalistic business model based on advertising. Likewise, employment in Latin America in communication and journalism has been linked with the heterogeneous productive structure in the region that contains, as mentioned before, a few big companies with flexibilization dynamics and a large number of small enterprises that offer underpaid jobs (Blanco and Ruiz, 2022). As an example of the former, there are big technified media conglomerates that adopt journalistic production logics that prioritize commercial values over public service values. In the Mexican context, the technological convergence coincided with aggressive business restructuring processes that led to mass dismissals of media workers and transformations in journalism (Rodelo, 2023).

The analysis of working conditions in Latin American journalism reveals an increase in flexibilization, instability, and multiple job holding (Blanco-Herrero et al., 2020). More specifically, the literature provides the following insights about each of the dimensions of precariousness:

- *Temporal dimension*: New-generation journalists see the profession as a temporary job (Reyna, 2017). There is evidence of outsourcing and service provision contracts (Rodelo, 2023). Nowadays, it is easier to become an editor, but occupying this position does not imply higher prestige or better working conditions (Hernández-Julián and Vera-Zambrano, 2020).

- *Organizational dimension*: There are heavier workloads and harder demands for full-time availability and for the acquisition of new abilities (Rodelo, 2023). Levels of formality and working conditions vary; the literature suggests that these aspects change according to the organization and characteristics of the media outlets, especially size and reach (local media vs. national media) (Espino, 2016; Hernández-Julián and Vera-Zambrano, 2020; Hughes and Márquez-Ramírez, 2017; Márquez-Ramírez et al., 2022).
- *Economic dimension*: There are important remuneration differences among journalists, related to individual experience or position (Hernández-Julián and Vera-Zambrano, 2020). Likewise, there is a high level of multiple job holding in the sector (Blanco-Herrero et al., 2020).
- *Social dimension*: There is evidence of fraudulent activity, as a result of which workers are stripped of social security or paid lower retirements (Rodelo, 2023). Unions, in the event they exist, are corporative, and ineffective when it comes to defending workers. Support and solidarity networks have emerged, but they gather a few members and their work is sporadic (Ramos-Rojas, 2022).

1.3. Factors associated to job precariousness in journalism

There are few studies that take into account factors associated with the precariousness of journalistic employment. The authors of the present study have focused their attention on three groups of predicting factors: sociodemographic, labor, and organizational.

1.3.1. Social demographic factors

Although it is a cross-sectional phenomenon, young people, immigrants, and women might suffer the hardest from job precariousness (Guadarrama et al., 2012). In 2006, the international survey of Walters et al. (2006) denounced the trend of incorporating younger and less qualified journalists into newsrooms in order to save costs. Between the years 2007 and 2017, the average age of journalists in Latin America decreased (Blanco-Herrero et al., 2020). Younger journalists have also been associated with multiple job holding, work in local media, and temporary contracts (Márquez-Ramírez et al., 2022)

Regarding gender, the numbers show that, between 2007 and 2017 in Latin America, more women than men undertook multiple employments and jobs outside journalism (Blanco-Herrero et al., 2020). Qualitative studies also reveal vertical and horizontal gender segregation dynamics within newsrooms, more instable career paths for women, and greater difficulties for them to balance their private and professional lives (Cepeda, 2020; Retegui and Ingrassia, 2022).

Regarding education, the literature indicates an ironic situation. Journalists with higher education degrees have greater job stability, and education now plays a more important role than ever before (Blanco-Herrero et al., 2020). At the same time, Weaver and Willnat (2012) report that the majority of journalists have a college degree. In 2022, 79% of journalists in Mexico had an undergraduate degree (Rodelo et al., 2023). So, it seems perfectly reasonable that, so far, no study has found a direct relation between the education levels of journalists and their salaries (Roses, 2011).

In the United States, job precariousness is associated with minorities. Cohen and Peuter (2022) have specifically emphasized the uneven character of job precariousness, as it affects women and non-white people the hardest. Apart from this research, there are no studies situated in Ibero-America that describe being part of a minority as a predicting factor of job precariousness. A further exploration of the matter is due, given the growing awareness about racism and discrimination on the basis of identity.

1.3.2. Labor factors

The literature has pointed out the relationship between atypical (informal) and temporal working modalities and the worsening of working conditions (Walters et al., 2006). Latin America has experienced an increase in flexible

and casual jobs. Both terms refer to jobs under implied contract and that are temporary (Blanco-Herrero et al., 2020).

Besides working modalities, the literature highlights that between 2007 and 2017, the number of journalists devoted to one specific beat or topic has decreased (Blanco-Herrero et al., 2020). Studies also place emphasis on the relationship between the lack of specialization and the worsening of conditions for deep and investigative journalism (Rodelo et al., 2023). However, there is no information linking this factor to the job precariousness of journalists. Another relevant labor factor is the organization of unions, whose poor implementation is one of the main alleged causes of journalists' job precariousness (Iglesias, 2004). In many countries, there is a generalized mistrust towards unions (García, 2011), which is why journalists rarely join one. Specifically, only 28% of journalists in Mexico are members of a union or trade organization (Rodelo et al., 2023).

1.3.3. Organizational and contextual factors

Within this group of factors, the authors analyze the organizational attributes of journalistic media. These factors can impact the work situation and shape journalistic practice. For example, when the employer is a media outlet with national reach, the company's headquarters tend to be in a large and important city. The opposite happens if journalists work for a local or community media organization.

The deepening of the analysis of the role of journalism has sparked a growing interest in Mexican local media. Experts have said, for example, that Mexican local media are more likely to be controlled by state governments because they depend on government advertising. For this reason, journalists working for local media have more precarious jobs, and are easier to bribe by the government (Espino, 2016). Experts also say local journalism is outdated (González Macías and Echeverría Victoria, 2017). Local journalists are more likely to become victims of lethal attacks (Hughes and Márquez-Ramírez, 2017). They are more likely to have fewer resources, lower levels of specialization, and greater job precariousness (Márquez-Ramírez et al., 2022). On the other hand, the authors do not possess data that would establish a relationship between media property and the working conditions of journalists. Anecdotal evidence suggests that there are tendencies towards flexible and casual jobs in private media outlets as well as in public, state, and social ones. Hence, the relevance of this factor remains limited.

Regarding the working conditions of journalists in different media, it is worth noting that printed newspapers in particular have had to implement reduction and organizational restructuring processes (Rodelo, 2023). However, digital newspapers do not offer optimal working conditions, either, because they are not able to meet their workers economic expectations. Digital media have been the main answer to a deteriorating journalistic industrial structure (Reyna, 2023). They have also fostered the culture of journalistic entrepreneurship, associated with atypical working modalities, the discourse of autonomy in creative work, and the rise of remote work (Cohen, 2015).

2. Objectives

Labor trends associated with job precariousness, like flexibilization, instability, and multiple job holding (Blanco-Herrero et al., 2020) indicate that there is a process of job precarization in journalism that coexists with restructuring dynamics and the digital convergence in the media (Rodelo, 2023)—patterns that intensified during the COVID-19 pandemic (De Frutos and Sanjurjo, 2021). The main objective of this study is to discover the level of job precariousness in journalistic employment and its dimensions, as well as the sociodemographic, organizational, and labor factors that predict them. The authors, therefore, propose the following research questions:

RQ1. What is the level of job precariousness and its dimensions in journalistic employment in Mexico?

RQ2. What sociodemographic, labor, and organizational factors predict the level of job precariousness of journalistic employment in Mexico?

3. Methodology

3.1. Study context

Job precariousness has complex and diverse causes. In Mexico, one of them is the history of economic instability, which has forced a large number of people to seek work in the informal sector of the economy (Mora, 2012). Many companies prefer to offer workers a service provision contract to avoid paying taxes and benefits. This reduces operations costs and, therefore, increases profit (Ibarra and González, 2010).

The access of Mexican journalists to their labor rights has depended on the existence of formal employment. If there is no such thing—whether they work full-time or on a project basis²—they are not legally recognized as employees but as service providers. The Mexican government has implemented social security programs for workers. One of them is *periodistas por cuenta propia* (freelance journalists), launched in 2022, which benefits self-employed journalists and journalists who do not receive social security from their employers. However, the program has been criticized because, through it, the state takes on a responsibility that employers should assume—guaranteeing social security for their workers. Hence, the original problem remains: informality and evasion of responsibilities on the part of employers—that is, labor fraud (Zavala, 2011).

3.2. Data sources and measures

The data analyzed in this article come from the results of the WJS-3 international survey (Rodelo et al., 2023). Conducted in Mexico between 2021 and 2023, this survey had a representative sample that included journalists from all 32 states of the national territory. The authors implemented a stratified random sampling strategy. They elaborated an ad hoc sampling frame consisting of a national directory of media organizations (González et al., 2023). The authors randomly sampled media outlets from 6 regions of the country, according to their characteristics and relevance. For each selected organization, depending on its size between 1 and 5 participants were invited, trying to comply with the principle of maximum variation according to their hierarchy and gender. The authors interviewed a total of 486 professional journalists by video call, phone call, or face-to-face. After the data cleansing stage, the authors discarded 26 rows with missing values in the variables integrating the job precariousness indicator used in the present study, which resulted in a sample of 460 journalists.

To indicate the level of precariousness, the authors used an unweighted additive score, the result of the addition of dichotomic variables that indicate four dimensions of precariousness: social, economic, temporal, and organizational (Guadarrama et al., 2012; Nigenda et al., 2020; Rodgers, 1989) (see Table 1). The score includes a subjective component, placing the fear of losing one's job as an indicator for the temporal dimension of job precariousness. It is worth mentioning that the percentage of people afraid of losing their job (53%) was higher than the percentage of people without a stable or full-time job (26%), which reveals how unstable journalistic employment is (even when people have full-time jobs) and how pertinent it was to include this subjective element to measure the temporal dimension.

² In Mexico, professional service gigs are referred to as fee-paid work (*trabajo por honorarios*) when constant or as freelance gigs when project-based.

Table 1. Dimensions of job precariousness in journalistic employment in Mexico (2023)

<i>Dimension</i>	<i>Operationalization</i>	<i>Incidence (n = 460)</i>
Temporal	High or very high fear of losing job in the next 12 months	52.6%
Organizational	Work less than 35 or more than 48 hours a week	73.5%
Economic	Salary equivalent to 2 general minimum wages or less	24.1%
Social	No social security	33.3%

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

The role of ten predicting variables organized into three categories was analyzed:

- *Social demographic factors:*

- (1) Gender,
- (2) Age,
- (3) tertiary studies, and
- (4) self-identification with a minority group.

Age was categorized into three blocks: under 25 years, 25-54 years, and over 55 years. Tertiary studies were coded with a dichotomic variable that distinguishes between people with no studies or with basic studies, including technical careers, and people with university and postgraduate studies. Self-identification with a minority group was coded with a dichotomic variable that distinguishes between people who reported that they belonged to a social or ethnic minority and those who did not.

- *Labor factors:*

- (5) Work modality,
- (6) specialization, and
- (7) participation in a union or trade organization.

The authors registered the dichotomic variable of specialization as positive when interviewed people stated that they usually work in or supervise only one specific section or topic. The union factor took into account participation in any organization, association, or group dedicated to journalism or communication professionals.

- *Organizational factors:*

- (8) The main organization is a digital medium (vs. other types),
- (9) the main organization is a public or state-owned medium (vs. commercial or community),
- (10) the main organization is a local one (vs. national or transnational).

The authors coded the three dichotomic variables on questions about the attributes of the main media outlet in which the interviewed person works. The term “digital media” was understood to refer to organizations whose core activity takes place in digital native media and on sociodigital networks. Non-digital media include organizations whose main activity is the production of printed newspapers, magazines, radio, television, multimedia journalism, or news agencies. The authors coded those who worked in public or state-owned organizations as people whose main job is in the public media. The person whose main job is in local media was

coded as being on of those who worked in media classified as local or regional in the media directory created for the sampling of journalists (González Macías et al., 2023).

The authors applied Kruskal-Wallis tests (a non-parametric alternative to the one-way Anova test) to determine if there were significant differences in the levels of precariousness of sample segments constituted according to factors of interest. For example, the first Kruskal-Wallis test was performed to compare men and women according to their level of precariousness; this test determined that there is a statistically significant difference. The results of the tests are presented in Table 2, together with the percentage distribution of respondents according to their level of precariousness.

As a complement, the authors performed an ordinal logistic regression analysis to model the influence of different variables on the level of job precariousness. In this analysis, it was necessary to remove the variables “gender” and “work modality”, so that the model would satisfy the proportional odds criterion according to Brant’s test. Once this goal was met (i.e., the authors did not reject a null hypothesis), the authors calculated the coefficients, significance, odds ratio, and confidence intervals for the variables that made up the model, which are displayed in Table 3.

4. Results

4.1. Job precariousness and its dimensions

Among the four job precariousness dimensions the authors considered in this study, the organizational one presented the highest incidence—indicated by insufficient or excessive amounts of hours worked per week (74%)—, followed by the temporal dimension—indicated by fear of losing one’s job (53%)—, the lack of social security (33%), and, finally, the economic dimension—indicated by a salary lower than 2 general minimum wages (24%) (see Table 1).

The multidimensional indicator made it possible to classify the interviewed journalists into five levels of precariousness: absence of precariousness, low precariousness (presence of only one dimension), medium precariousness (two dimensions), high precariousness (three dimensions), and very high precariousness (four dimensions). Most of the journalists (37%) occupied the medium level of precariousness (see Table 2).

4.2. Factors predicting job precariousness in journalistic employment

The analyses of the distribution based on precariousness levels according to the variables of interest resulted in four conditions that revealed statistically significant differences among groups: First, gender, $X^2(1) = 4.142$, $p = 0.042$; second, work modality, $X^2(5) = 70.419$, $p < 0.001$; third, digital media as the main job, $X^2(1) = 9.685$, $p = 0.002$; and, last, local media as the main job, $X^2(1) = 8.351$, $p = 0.004$.

This evidence suggests that the aforementioned variables may predict precariousness levels in journalism. While 21% of the surveyed men had a high or very high level of precariousness, 30% of the women were in the same situation. Regarding the type of work, those with stable full-time jobs (15 %) were the smallest group with high or very high precariousness levels; the largest groups in this level were people in temporary part-time jobs (75 %), work for fees (56 %) and freelance or entrepreneurial work (52 %). People whose main job is in digital media were more likely to be in a high or very high precariousness situation (34%) compared to those who work for other kinds of media (22%). Finally, people whose main job is in local media were more likely to be in a situation of high or very high precariousness (27 %) compared to those who work for national media (19 %) (see Table 2).

In contrast, the authors found no statistically significant differences in the analysis of age, tertiary studies, self-identification with minorities, dedication to a single beat or topic (i.e., specialization), union membership, and work in public media. In each of these cases, the authors concluded that there is insufficient data to assert that there are differences in job precariousness levels among these groups (see Table 2).

Table 2. Levels of job precariousness in journalistic employment in Mexico according to variables of interest (2023)

	Level of precariousness (percentage)					p
	No precariousness	Low precariousness	Medium precariousness	High precariousness	Very high precariousness	
Total (n = 460)	8.0	30.7	36.5	19.3	5.4	
Sociodemographic variables						
Men (n = 252)	6.0	36.9	36.5	17.1	3.6	0.042
Women (n = 208)	10.6	23.1	36.5	22.1	7.7	
Age						
Under 25 (n = 9)	11.1	22.2	44.4	22.2	0.0	0.991
25 to 54 (n = 400)	8.2	29.5	38.2	18.5	5.5	
Over 55 (n = 51)	5.9	41.2	21.6	25.5	5.9	
Tertiary studies						
No (n = 65)	9.2	35.4	35.4	16.9	3.1	0.226
Yes (n = 395)	7.8	29.9	36.7	19.7	5.8	
Self-identification with minority group						
No (n = 421)	7.8	31.6	36.3	19.2	5.0	0.287
Yes (n = 39)	10.3	20.5	38.5	20.5	10.3	
Labor variables						
Work modality						
Stable- FT (n = 331)	10.6	36.6	37.5	13.3	2.1	<0.001
Stable- PT (n = 25)	36.0	28.0	16.0	20.0	20.0	
Temporary- FT (n = 12)	8.3	33.3	33.3	8.3	16.7	
Temporary- PT (n = 4)	0.0	0.0	25.0	75.0	0.0	
Freelance or entrepreneur (n = 44)	0.0	9.1	38.6	31.8	20.5	
Work for fees (n = 43)	2.3	7.0	34.9	51.2	4.7	
Dedicated to a single beat or topic						
No (n = 373)	7.0	30.3	37.3	20.9	4.6	0.215
Sí (n = 87)	12.6	32.2	33.3	12.6	9.2	
Member of a union or trade organization						
No (n = 332)	8.4	33.1	34.9	18.1	5.4	0.080
Yes (n = 128)	7.0	24.2	40.6	22.7	5.5	
Organizational and contextual variables						
Digital media as the main job						
No (n = 341)	8.2	34.6	35.5	17.0	4.7	0.002
Yes (n = 119)	7.6	19.3	39.5	26.1	7.6	
Public or state-owned media as the main job						
No (n = 432)	7.6	30.1	37.5	19.0	5.8	0.178
Yes (n = 28)	14.3	39.3	21.4	25.0	0.0	
Local media as the main job						
No (n = 117)	13.7	35.0	32.5	15.4	3.4	0.004
Yes (n = 343)	6.1	29.2	37.9	20.7	6.1	

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

The ordinal logistic regression analysis reaffirmed the relevance of the variables “digital media” and “local media”. The odds ratio allowed the authors to establish that a journalist who has digital media as their main job, is 1.7 times more likely to be in a precarious job compared to a person with any other kind of media as their main job (newspaper, magazine, radio, television, agency or multimedia), keeping the rest of the variables constant. On the other hand, a person whose main job is for a local media organization is 1.6 times more likely to be in a more precarious situation compared to a person whose main job is for a national media company, keeping the rest of the variables constant (see Table 3).

Table 3. Ordinal logistic regression model to predict job precariousness in journalistic employment in Mexico

Variable	Coefficient	Standard deviation	t	p	OR	2.5%	97.5%
Age (ref: <=24)							
25-54	0.131	0.629	0.208	0.835	1.140	0.333	4.015
>=55	0.173	0.674	0.257	0.797	1.189	0.319	4.557
Tertiary studies (ref: no)	0.305	0.247	1.234	0.217	1.357	0.837	2.208
Self-identification with minority group (ref: no)	0.372	0.312	1.193	0.233	1.451	0.786	2.681
Specialization (ref: no)	-0.211	0.225	-0.937	0.349	0.810	0.521	1.259
Member of union (ref: no)	0.199	0.192	1.035	0.300	1.220	0.837	1.779
Digital media as main job (ref: no)	0.550	0.197	2.788	0.005	1.733	1.179	2.555
Public media as main job (ref: no)	-0.291	0.378	-0.770	0.441	0.748	0.355	1.565
Local media as main job (ref: no)	0.463	0.204	2.267	0.023	1.589	1.066	2.376

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

5. Discussion

Recent studies on job precariousness in Latin American journalism do not present an operationalization of the concept of this phenomenon, an aspect to which this paper intends to make a contribution. Among the analyzed sociodemographic factors, gender was the only one identified as a significant factor; more specifically, women are more affected by high and very high levels of job precariousness in the field of journalism. This outcome coincides with the results of other studies describing gendered phenomena that promote greater precariousness among women, such as greater multiple job holding among women, horizontal and vertical gender segregation in the organization of journalistic work, and greater difficulty for women to balance their private and professional lives (Blanco-Herrero et al., 2020; Cepeda, 2020; Retegui and Ingrassia, 2022).

On the other hand, this study did not detect statistical differences between groups according to their age, tertiary studies, or self-identification with minorities. Despite the decrease in the average age of journalists in Latin America (Blanco-Herrero et al., 2020), the result of this analysis indicates that young people are not in a more precarious condition compared to other age segments. In the case of tertiary education, it is possible that since this is a common educational background for journalists (Weaver and Willnat, 2012), it may no longer make a difference in their working conditions, which is what happens in Spain (Roses, 2011).

This study confirms suspicions that atypical and informal work modalities undertaken by the media to reduce payroll costs (Walters et al., 2006; Rodelo, 2023) result in higher levels of job precariousness for journalists. In Mexico, the modalities with a higher tendency towards job precariousness are fee-based work, freelance work, and part-time temporary jobs. Likewise, this study reveals that although specialization has an impact on the characteristics of journalistic practice, it is not associated with a lower level of job precariousness. Participation or membership in a trade union is beneficial when the union or trade organization is effective in representing workers; however, this is not usually the case in Latin American countries (García Luarte, 2011), which may explain why this factor has not been significant in explaining the high levels of job precariousness.

Finally, this study revealed that people who have local or digital media as their main job are more vulnerable to job precariousness. The first of these findings confirms the suspicions in abundant literature that suggest important differences in the characteristics and conditions of local journalism developed under subnational dynamics (Espino, 2016; González and Echeverría, 2017; Hughes and Márquez-Ramírez, 2017; Márquez-Ramírez et al., 2022), as well as the relevance of the place of origin as a predicting factor of social status (Bayón, 2006). Digital journalism business models are still incipient and related to an entrepreneurial culture that promotes conditions and discourses associated with greater precariousness, such as informal work, remote work, and the exaltation of autonomy (Cohen, 2015). These may be the causes of the predominant precariousness associated with digital journalism.

The fact that journalists working in local and digital media are more likely to find themselves at higher levels of precariousness is bad news for three reasons: First, it suggests the economic vulnerability of local and digital media organizations and ventures, which would hypothetically be in worse conditions for providing living wages, formal jobs, social security, reasonable working hours, and job stability. Secondly, job precariousness in local media affects a news sector that is essential for keeping citizens informed about what is happening in their community. Likewise, job precariousness in digital media affects a media sector that is more independent from political power (as it does not require state concessions), is more accessible to entrepreneurs (as it requires less seed capital), and has a greater capacity to respond in time to the information needs of the audience.

6. Conclusions

This study operationalized job precariousness in journalism based on an indicator that encompasses four dimensions. Thus, the authors found that most of the journalists working in Mexico do so under one or more conditions of precariousness. Of all these conditions, the most common was the excessive or insufficient number of working hours. The latter is related to the organizational dimension of precariousness, as it is indicative of a lack of control over working conditions. Specifically, excessive intensity in journalistic work has been related not only to a heavier workload but also to a higher rate of multiple job holding.

By taking into account many factors in the same analysis, the authors were able to contrast their relative influence. Thus, this study found that gender, work modality, and having as the main media job a position in digital or local media are all related to precariousness, while age, tertiary studies, self-identification with minorities, specialization, being a member of a union, and working for a public media company are not.

These findings refer to journalism in Mexico and, therefore, are not necessarily valid for all Latin American countries; however, subsequent studies based on the same method and operationalization will be able to make a comparative analysis about journalists' job precariousness. Likewise, future studies should make a deep and, preferably, comparative analysis of the factors the present research identified as having the highest levels of job precariousness. It is particularly urgent to delve deeper into the working conditions in digital media, as this is a rapidly developing journalistic sector.

The authors hope that, based on these findings, all actors involved (journalists, civil society, and government) can formulate proposals that respond to the particular problems of journalists who find themselves in conditions associated with the highest levels of job precariousness. An urgent recommendation based on these findings is to implement strategies to replace notions that normalize journalists' job precariousness (for example, the acceptance of low salaries, unconditional and full-time availability, or temporary contracts) with ideas that are coherent with the demand for fair jobs (that is, with decent salaries, stability, social protection, and bargaining power for media workers).

This study has three limitations that should be taken into account when interpreting its results. First, the operationalization of the multidimensional concept of precariousness the authors used does not include within its organizational dimension the element

"The authors concluded that there is insufficient data to assert that there are differences in job precariousness levels among these groups."

of optimally safe working conditions. This aspect encompasses the risks derived from working in hazardous environments or under stressful conditions (Organización Internacional del Trabajo, 2012). The authors prioritized precariousness dimensions not related to safety in journalism since there is a lack of information about them and an abundant literature already covers working safety matters. The other two limitations come from the data analysis: the Kruskal-Wallis test is sensitive to the sample size, so it is possible that surveys with a larger number of cases will find statistical differences where the Kruskal-Wallis tests did not. On the other hand, to satisfy the assumption required for the ordinal logistic regression, it was necessary to conduct it without the gender and work modality variables, which limits the predictive power of the statistical model.

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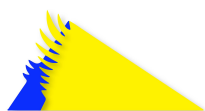
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