Leah F. Vosko (York University, Principal investigator)
Pramila Aggarwal (George Brown)
John Anderson & Katherine Scott (Canadian Council on Social Development)
Pat Armstrong, Tanas Das Gupta & Eric Tucker (York University)
Stephanie Bernsten & Katherine Lippel (University of Quebec at Montreal)
Cynthia Crandall (University of Toronto)
Alice de Wolff (Community Director and Independent Researcher)
Mary Gefferty (Yorkdale Community Legal Services)
Andrew Jackson (Canadian Labour Congress)
Andrew King (United Steelworkers of America)
Deena Ladd & Lynn Sprink (Toronto Organizing for Fair Employment)
Wayne Lewchuk (McMaster University)
Chris Schenk (Ontario Federation of Labour)
Emile Tompa (Institute for Work and Health)
Nancy Zukewich (Statistics Canada)

To learn more about this SSHRC-funded CURA project, contact:
Dr. Leah F. Vosko
Canada Research Chair in Feminist Political Economy
School of Social Sciences (Political Science)
Atkinson Faculty of Liberal and Professional Studies
4700 Keele Street, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M3J 1P3
lvosko@yorku.ca

To learn more about research at York University, contact:
Dr. Stan Shapson
Vice-President Research & Innovation
200 York Lanes, 4700 Keele St.
Toronto, Ontario, Canada M3J 1P3
tel: 416 650 8307, fax: 416 650 8197
vpr@yorku.ca
www.research.yorku.ca
A rise in precarious employment

The nature of employment is changing in Canada. In 2003, full-time permanent jobs represented just 63% of total employment, down from 67% in 1989. Over the same period, self-employment grew from 7 to 10% of total employment, and the share of people with temporary jobs rose steadily.

These trends signal the rise of “precarious employment” – forms of work involving limited social benefits and statutory entitlements, job insecurity, low job tenure, low wages, and high risks of ill-health.

Public policy has been slow to adjust to the realities of the contemporary labour market. There is a continued tendency to tie access to comprehensive social and labour protections to the full-time permanent job. That means that fewer workers are covered by social and labour protections such as workers’ compensation, employment standards, and employment insurance. And the consequences are particularly acute for equity-seeking groups, especially women, people of colour, immigrants, and people with disabilities.

A better shared understanding

The CURA on Contingent Work is examining the growth of precarious employment in order to foster new statistical, legal, political, and economic understandings of this phenomenon that are grounded in workers’ experiences and directed at improving their quality and conditions of work and health.

This dynamic alliance brings together researchers from five post-secondary institutions (York, George Brown, McMaster, Toronto, and Quebec) as well as public and non-profit sector organizations, including Toronto Organizing for Fair Employment, Parkdale Community Legal Services, the Institute for Work and Health, the Ontario Federation of Labour, the Canadian Council on Social Development, and the Housing, Family and Social Statistics Division of Statistics Canada. It is examining the shape, size, and location of precarious employment in Canada; work organization and health; labour laws, legislation and policy; and improving working conditions and association building.

A sound investment in our future

The social problems affecting our world today are highly complex. Solving them requires an interdisciplinary and collaborative approach that incorporates many perspectives such as economics, sociology, politics, labour studies, history and geography. Research led by York faculty delves deeper, providing the kind of comprehensive insights that provoke meaningful social change.

The goal of the CURA on Contingent Work is to harness knowledge to mitigate labour market insecurity by: creating a multi-dimensional approach to conceptualizing and measuring precarious employment; developing the concept ‘employment strain,’ which adds dimensions of uncertainty over future job possibilities, earnings, work location, and work schedule, to the traditional notion of ‘job strain’; illustrating to governments that regulatory effectiveness (i.e., application and enforcement as well as laws on the books) is crucial to limiting precarious employment; and, advancing the notion of “community unionism”, a form of organizing characterized by worker-centered leadership and training.

The cost of not acting

Without action, precarious employment is likely to increase in Canada. Without regulatory intervention, the standard full-time employment relationship will remain the model upon which labour laws, legislation, and policies are based. Fewer workers will have access to employment protection and compensation and equity-seeking groups will be affected most.

Real-world solutions to real-world challenges

Real-world challenges demand different angles, different approaches, and different attitudes. Interdisciplinary and collaborative, York University research delivers relevant insights and meaningful solutions that address today’s complex social issues.