

## Qualitative characteristics of lectures employment in the Russian universities in conditions of precarity

S Lobova<sup>1,2\*</sup> and A Bogoviz<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Altai State University, 59 Lenina str., Barnaul 656035 Russia

<sup>2</sup> Ural State University of Economics, 8<sup>th</sup> March str., Yekaterinburg 620144 Russia

<sup>3</sup> National Research University Higher School of Economics, 20 Myasnitskaya str., Moscow 101000 Russia

E-mail: barnaulhome@mail.ru

**Abstract.** The transformation of the system of social and labor relations in the country's vocational education has several negative consequences, which include the following: significant changes in the content and scope of administrative and documentary work of scientific and pedagogical workers, the widespread introduction of formalized requirements for their activities, curtailment of academic freedoms, university management on the principles and approaches of business, inadequate methods of valuation and accounting of labor, widespread transition to a short-term labor contract, relatively low wages, etc. All of the above are the signs of employment precarity. These signs are most clearly marked and visible in regional universities, thereby creating a threat to their sustainable development.

**Keywords:** precarity, precarity of employment, education, labor contract, university lectures

### 1. Introduction

Currently, the higher education system is in a state of turbulence, which is caused by a number of factors: (1) tightening the requirements for universities in terms of the internationalization of scientific results, research, attracting foreign students and teachers; (2) reduction of financial resources for the maintenance and organization of university activities; (3) changing the nature of teachers' work, increasing the time for developing methodological support, increasing the research component in total employment; (4) curtailing academic freedoms, which are one of the most important values of the university institutional environment, replacing them with the formal rules of scientific productivity in business categories aimed at producing indicators, rather than scientific results; (5) a decreasing social status of a university professor; (6) the use of methods for evaluating and accounting the work of university teachers, which are developed and used in industry or public service, as a rule; (7) a widespread transition to short-term labor contracts with the overwhelming majority of teachers (the so-called "academic proletariat") due to the reduction in the number of jobs, which does not guarantee the stability of their employment.

Such transformations in the higher education system are accompanied by differentiation in the structure of university lectures and professors. In our opinion, these are the objective circumstances of the appearance of signs of precarity in their employment.

At present, an urgent need to overcome these trends has arisen, and this requires the following: (1) not a situational but a deep analysis of the institutional basis and the determinants of employment for teachers of regional universities; (2) an adequate and objective assessment of the threats and consequences of changes in their personnel potential due to the increasing precarity of employment through the prism of the sustainable development of a separate university and the vocational education system as a whole.

## **2. Materials and Methods**

According to the results of research conducted by the scholars of the Higher School of Economics [1], the staff of Russian universities numbered 242.8 thousand people in 2016/2017 (without external part-timers). Its composition decreased by 9.2% from the 2000/2001 academic year and decreased by one third (33.8%) if compared to the 2010/2011 academic year. If we describe the social portrait of a modern lecture in a Russian higher education institution, then with greater probability it is a woman (57.6%) aged 30 to 60 years (64.4%), who already defended her thesis for the Degree of Candidate of Sciences (57.0% of the total number of lectures and 78.5% among the “graduated” teachers). And she has an academic rank of Assistant Professor (77.4% among those with academic ranks). It should be noted that the number of students per teacher in a university (excluding external part-timers) remained almost unchanged (10 people), which is explained by the simultaneous unidirectional change in the number of teachers and students.

We have reasons to believe that the decline in the number of persons employed as a scientific and pedagogical employee of higher education institutions at the main place of work is due to the following circumstances. First, the number of educational institutions of higher education has decreased: from 965 in 2000/2001, 1115 in the 2010/2011 to 818 in the 2016/2017 academic year [1]. So, the number of jobs has decreased. Second, the number of students studying at universities in Russia also decreased (by 7%, from 4741.4 to 4399.5 thousand people, from 2000 to 2016). This can be explained by the transition from the specialty (5 years of study at the university) to the Bologna education system (mainly four years of study). The country is growing in scale, a number of programs are being implemented, aimed at reorienting school graduates towards secondary vocational education and training skilled workers. Third, the state control over the quality of education in the Russian educational institutions of higher education has increased, leading to a change in the number of educational institutions. Fourth, one may observe the increasing signs of precarity in the activities of university lectures, especially regional ones. It was caused by the above-mentioned transformations in the system of higher education and the emergence of “redundant” teachers in connection with the need to optimize the costs of the educational process at the university and the change in approaches to assessing the performance of the university’s teaching work. We believe that in the list above, the last circumstance has the greatest negative impact on changes in the qualitative and quantitative composition of teachers in Russian universities. We find indirect confirmation of the stated hypothesis in the increased number of studies on the precarity of employment of university lectures, both in the world (for example, [2, 3]) and in the Russian (for example, [4, 5]) scientific space.

In this paper, the author’s vision on the activities of scientific and pedagogical workers of regional universities in the context of precarity of employment is presented. To conduct this research, we relied on the methods of analysis, synthesis, and comparison of the results of alternative scientific research in the subject area.

## **3. Results**

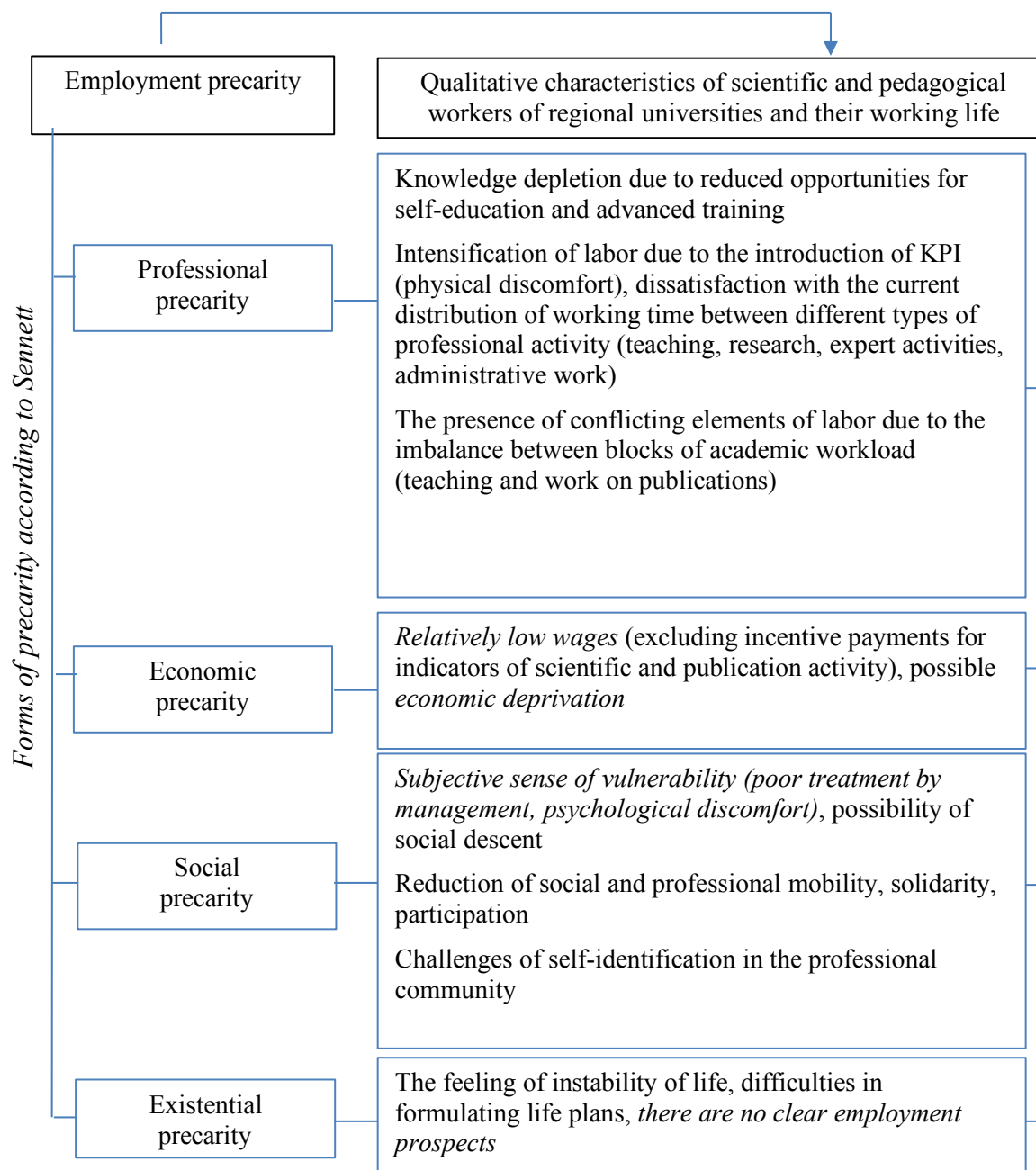
Precarity, as a phenomenon accompanying the transformation processes in the labor market, manifests itself in the absence of job security [6], a violation of professional identity [7], an economic vulnerability [8], a transition to the sphere of non-standard, informal, unstable labor relations [9]. It is believed that precarity can affect any person, regardless of his/her socio-demographic characteristics [10], place of residence, and place of work. Such manifestations adversely affect a person’s life, violate the usual life rhythm, foundations, social status, financial stability. The life of such a person is accompanied by

sufferings. Guy Standing designates this suffering as the “Four A”: Anxiety due to uncertainty; Alienation - in the sense that they are not doing what they want, and also they are doing a lot of things that they would not want to do; Anomie in the Durkheim sense, i.e. their despair caused by the lack of a way out of the current situation; and Anger as a result of the previous three points [6].

Using the term “precarity of employment,” we adhere to its meaningful understanding proposed by O. V. Veredyuk [11]. This allows us to interpret the precarity of employment of scientific and pedagogical workers of universities as a state of instability and uncertainty of social and labor relations. In such relations, work at the university ceases to be the subject of medium- and long-term planning in terms of employment and income. We believe that the identification of precarity employment should take into account the following specification of E. V. Maslova. Precarity of employment is “not just precarious employment, but its forced, unprotected, and unreliable varieties, in which the position of its carriers deteriorates and becomes unstable, unguaranteed in all aspects: economic, legal, social, psychological. It is incorrect methodologically to consider the employees who voluntarily choose a non-standard form of employment for themselves” [12]. Among the scientific and pedagogical workers of regional universities, teachers who voluntarily reduced their employment at the university to a fraction of the rate and not due to forced circumstances can be attributed to the latter one. Precarity of employment always leads to a deterioration in the quality of the working life.

Manifestations of the influence of precarity on the working life of scientific and pedagogical workers of regional universities, in relation to the types of precarity developed by R. Sennett [13], are presented in Figure 1. The authors identified the qualitative characteristics of scientific and pedagogical workers and their employment based on the results of personal interviews with scientific and pedagogical workers of regional universities in Barnaul, Omsk, Yekaterinburg, and Ulan-Ude. Characteristics were determined on the basis of interviews with teachers regarding the feelings they experience in performing professional functions, evaluating work activities and perceptions of the situation. And also, the authors analyzed publications on the research topic (in particular, [5]).

It should be noted that some of the characteristics shown in this Figure (in italics) are the indices measuring the scale of employment precarity (Employment Precariousness Scale, EPRES) [14]. As follows from our Figure, the research and teaching staff of regional universities in the above employment conditions have the same feelings as described by Standing in the book with reference to the employment precarity. This is another factor confirming the presence of signs of precarity in the employment of lectures at regional universities in Russia.



**Figure 1.** Qualitative characteristics of scientific and pedagogical workers of regional universities and the conditions of their employment through the prism of precarity. Source: compiled by the authors.

#### 4. Discussion and Conclusion

Currently, only teaching, communication with students through various means of communication, examinations and tests, mentoring and shepherding are perceived as the “academic deadlock” [15], and it cease to be necessary and sufficient for the teacher to be competitive and have secure employment in both Russian and foreign universities.

Strengthening the employment precarity of scientific and pedagogical workers, competition for relatively small financial resources form a new type of lectures, the “features” of which may include the following characteristics: she has high productivity in terms of publishing articles, attracting grant funds;

a person strives to build a career, has certain mobility for participation in scientific and practical conferences; she has many scientific missions; she is involved in collaborations and scientific networks; she has no burden in the form of family or professional responsibility [16]; the richness of her activities is explained by the following motives (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Self-motivation explaining the reasons for working at a Russian university.

Types of self-motivation	Interpretation of motive
Instrumental and financial motivation	Expectations for high wages, readiness for better performance in accordance with the indicators for the purpose of financial encouragement. The content and quality of labor are not priorities.
Competitive motivation	The motive to take a worthy place in high school, Russian or even world rankings of scientists.
Compensatory and promising professional motivation	The motive of ensuring their future with a high level of their own achievements in order to protect themselves from the possibility of being unclaimed by an expert. In this case, the motive of replenishing the “portfolio” of their own professional achievements is valid. These achievements do not lose value in the event of a change of place of work.
Psychological motivation.	The motive to avoid stress, which can be caused by a low rating in the immediate environment. This is the motive for not being among the last in terms of the number of achievements and in terms of wages. This is directly related to the fact that when evaluating their work, its content and results become the subject of open discussion.
Moral motivation	The motive of performing professional duty, obtaining moral satisfaction from the content and quality of their professional activities, that is, the motive of awareness of the usefulness and relevance of the profession.
Collective image motivation	The motive of ensuring moral satisfaction from working at a university that has a good reputation and occupies a worthy place in the ranking of educational institutions.

Source: compiled by the authors on materials [17].

However, it should be noted that even the presence of such qualities in a modern university lecture does not make this person free from the employment precariousness. One should understand that research contracts, scientific networks, and collaborations are also unreliable institutions and have signs of urgency. More than that the majority of grants are allocated for a certain period, after which it is decided to continue or end. And the struggle for a new grant does not guarantee an automatic victory at all; networks and collaborations are of a project nature and can also be lost after solving research tasks or losing the research interest of participants to each other. The list of journals, in which publications have or do not have recognition in scientific circles, is mobile and inconstant.

Consequently, we can conclude that the employment of a teacher at a Russian university has signs of insecurity and precariousness. This thesis has in its content the formulation of the factors reducing the stability of a modern university in time and space. This requires developing response measures from the state for the successful implementation of national projects “Science” and “Education”.

## 5. Acknowledgments

The reported study was funded by the RFBR according to the research project № 19-010-00900.

## References

- [1] Gokhberg L M, Kovaleva G G, and Kovaleva N N 2018 *Education in figures: 2018: a brief statistical compendium* (Moscow, Russia: “HSE”)
- [2] O’Keefe T, and Courtois A 2019 ‘Not one of the family’: gender and precarious work in the neoliberal university *Gender, Work & Organization* **1** pp 1-17
- [3] Pérez M, and Montoya A 2018 The unsustainability of the neoliberal public university: towards an ethnography of precarity in academia *Revista de Dialectología y Tradiciones Populares* **1** pp A1-A16

- [4] Lazarev G Martinenko O and Lazarev I 2015 New university strategies in the development of human resources *University Management: Practice and Analysis* **1** pp 53-63
- [5] Abramov R, Gruzdev I, and Terentyev E 2017 Working Time and Role Strains of Research and Teaching Staff in a Modern Russian University *Voprosy Obrazvaniya* **1** pp 88-111
- [6] Standing G 2011 *The precariat: the new dangerous class* (Bloomsbury Academic)
- [7] Bizyukov P 2014 *What is prekariat?* Available at: <http://trudprava.ru/expert/article/employart/1182> (Accessed 06 03 2019)
- [8] Wilson M 2013 *Precarious work: The need for a new policy framework* (The Whitlam Institute)
- [9] Gasyukova E N 2015 Prekarization: conceptual foundations, factors, and estimates *Outlines of Global Transformations: Politics, Economics, Law* **6** pp 28-46
- [10] Gimpelson V E and Kapelyushnikov R I 2005 *Precarious work and the Russian labor market* (Higher School of Economics)
- [11] Veredyuk O V 2013 Instability of employment: theoretical concept and assessment of its scale in Russia *Vestnik SpbGU [Vestnik of Saint Petersburg University]* **1** pp 25-32
- [12] Maslova E V 2017 On the issue of the method of identifying the prekarian layer based on the analysis of standard and non-standard forms of employment *Vestnik of the Voronezh Institute of High Technologies* **2** pp 175-182
- [13] Ricceri M 2015 Social precarity and sustainable growth: reflections on a dangerous contradiction *Uroven zhizni naseleniya regionov Rossii [Living Standards in the Regions of Russia]* **3**(1) pp 3–37
- [14] Vives A Vanroelen C Amable M Ferrer M Moncada S Llorens C Muntaner C Benavides F G and Benach J 2011 Employment precariousness in Spain: Prevalence, social distribution, and population-attributable risk percent of poor mental health *International Journal of Health Services* **41**(4) pp 625-646
- [15] Cardozo K M 2017 Academic labor: who cares? *Critical Sociology* **43**(3) pp 405-428
- [16] Ivancheva M Lynch K and Keating K 2019 Precarity, gender and care in the neoliberal academy *Gender, Work & Organization* **2** pp 1-15
- [17] Bagirova A P, Klyuev A K, Notman O V, Shubat O M, Shcherbina E Yu, and Yashin A A 2016 *Teaching work in modern Russia: the transformation of content and assessment* (Ekaterinburg, Russia: Ural State University Press)