

# Non-standard work arrangements

*Harvey Krahn*

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Most employed Canadians have a full-time, year-round, permanent, paid job. But as in other industrial market economies, alternatives to this standard type of employment appear to be slowly increasing. Non-standard work, also described as "atypical work" or "contingent work", takes a variety of forms. <sup>(1)</sup> Compared to the middle of the century when it was largely non-existent, part-time work has become much more common in Canada, particularly in the last two decades. More recently, short-term employment, temporary-help agency work, and own-account (no paid employees) self-employment have also increased.

While the outline of these trends can be seen, more detailed analysis is needed. Because of limited data and a lack of consensus regarding operational definitions, estimates of the extent and growth of non-standard work in Canada tend to be vague and contradictory. It remains unclear whether non-standard jobs are common in all industrial sectors, largely restricted to service industries, or primarily found in lower-tier service industries (see [Methodology and definitions](#)). Furthermore, it would be useful to see how age and sex are related to non-standard employment status.

Some workers obviously choose alternative forms of employment (for example, part-time work) because of personal preferences. But for others, such choices might be a response to a difficult labour market. <sup>(2)</sup> In other words, some workers may create their own jobs because none are available, or may choose temporary work only when permanent jobs are scarce. On the supply side of the labour market equation, researchers have debated the extent to which "flexible firms" have emerged in the economic restructuring of the 1980s. Such firms rely heavily on part-time, temporary or sub-contracted workers in order to reduce their costs and their commitment to employees. <sup>(3)</sup>

Non-standard jobs typically provide less job security, lower pay, and fewer fringe benefits. To the extent that non-standard employment is replacing full-time, year-round, permanent work, the financial security of some Canadian workers may be decreasing. <sup>(4)</sup> Non-standard jobs are concentrated within particular segments of the labour market, and are more likely to be held by specific population sub-groups, so their impact is also unequally distributed.

## Self-employment

In 1989, 7% of all employed 15 to 64 year-old Canadians were own-account self-employed, roughly the same number were employers, and the vast majority (85%) were employees ([Table 1](#)). Young workers were least likely to be among the own-account self-employed. The proportion of own-account self-employed increases across age categories, but more so for men. One in ten men aged 45 and older are self-employed (without any employees), compared with 8% of women. However, the proportion of employers increases much more significantly with age among men.



### Table 1 Non-standard employment, 1989

*Source: General Social Survey*

To what extent do different industries provide opportunities for self-employment, or perhaps force people to take up this form of work? Less than 30% of Canadians are employed in the goods-producing industries and a similar proportion of the own-account self-employed are found here. The agricultural industry, where family farms are still quite common, displays a very high level of own-account self-employment (45%). While not as high as in agriculture, own-account work is also quite common in construction (13%), an industry in which individual entrepreneurs continue to operate. However, own-account self-employment is rare in the manufacturing and natural resource-based industries, where large work organizations are prevalent.

In the service sector, very little own-account self-employment is observed in education, health, and welfare (where most workers are public employees). While only 6% of those working in distributive services are own-account self-employed, a higher-than-average proportion (9%) are found in business services. However, own-account employment is most extensive (11%) in other consumer services. Because of its large size (over 1.3 million workers), other consumer services contains more own-account workers than any other sector, including agriculture and business services.

Combining the own-account self-employed and employers, 14% of working Canadians fall into the general self-employed category. This combined figure matches the Labour Force Survey (LFS) estimate of 14% in both 1987 and 1990. While this total is clearly higher than the 11% observed over a decade earlier (1975), closer examination of the data reveals that the number of employers grew somewhat more quickly than the number of own-account self-employed. <sup>(5)</sup> While own-account self-employment should therefore be recognized, it should not be over-emphasized in discussions of a trend towards non-standard employment.

## Temporary employment

The analysis of temporary employment is restricted to the 85% of working 15 to 64 year-olds classified as employees. A total of 8% of Canadian employees (799,000) identified themselves as temporary workers (in a job with a specified end-date) in 1989. Studies using a similar definition of temporary employment provide estimates of around 5% in France, about 6% to 7% in Britain, above 8% in West Germany, over 10% in Japan, and in excess of 12% in Denmark. (6) Thus, Canada does not exhibit an unusually high or low level of temporary work. These foreign studies concur that temporary work has been slowly increasing - the same probably also applies to Canada.

Young workers are considerably more likely to be in temporary jobs, while middle-aged males are least likely to be in temporary jobs. (7) Workers in construction, where employment contracts are often limited to the completion of a specific project, report the highest level of temporary employment (16%). Thus, as in the case of own-account self-employment, workers in this traditional blue-collar industry face a higher-than-average chance of being in non-standard employment. However, the second highest rate of temporary employment is reported by workers in other consumer services, where 13% have jobs with a specific end date. Since this sector employs many more people than the construction industry, the absolute number of temporary workers (136,000) is almost twice as high as in construction (69,000),

Construction and other consumer services are industries characterized by relatively small work organizations, which helps explain why the rate of temporary work is highest in small firms. But despite this higher rate, the largest absolute number of temporary workers (274,000) is found in large organizations, where the greatest share of workers are employed.

Many of these large organizations are in education, health, and welfare, where the rate of temporary work (10%) is higher than average. In fact, given its absolute size, this sector has more temporary workers (184,000) than any other. Finally, 8% of Canadians employed in public administration (90,000 in total) reported having temporary jobs.

## Part-time employment

The increase in part-time jobs with the expansion of the service industries has been well documented. Between 1975 and 1990, full-time employment in Canada increased by 30%, compared with an almost 50% increase for part-time employment. (8) But this trend to a higher proportion of part-time jobs appeared to slow in the second half of the 1980s. In 1981, prior to the recession, 13.5% of all employed Canadians held part-time jobs. This figure rose to 15.4% by 1983 and shifted only marginally in the following years. In 1989, the increase in the number of part-time jobs was smaller than in any year since the beginning of the decade. (9)

Nevertheless, part-time work clearly remains the most common form of non-standard employment. The GSS estimates show 15% of employed Canadians aged 15 to 64 held part-time jobs in 1989. Women were much more likely to be working part time (25% compared with 7% of men).

The young were most likely to work part time, with more than three-quarters of a million reporting that they worked less than 30 hours per week. The prevalence of part-time employment among young workers reflects the fact that many are also students, for whom a part-time job may be preferable. Among men, part-time work is largely restricted to the young, but a significant minority of employed women of all ages hold part-time positions. While 31% of young men work part time, the proportion of older men in part-time jobs is very low. Among women, a full 40% of the youngest age group held part-time jobs, while between 20% and 24% in each older group reported a part-time job.

About 7 in 10 young part-time workers say they work less than 30 hours per week because they are attending school. The majority of older female part-time workers say they work part time because they do not want a full-time job, or for family or personal reasons. The few older men in part-time jobs generally report themselves as involuntary part-timers who would work full time if they could find such a job. [\(10\)](#)



## Chart **Non-standard employment\* by industry, 1989.**

*Source: General Social Survey*

*\* Comprises part-time, part-year and temporary work.*

While part-time work appears to complement the school and family interests of most part-time employees, not all are in these non-standard jobs by choice. However, involuntary part-time employment declined in the second half of the 1980s as the economy recovered. In 1986, the LFS showed an average of 28.4% of part-time workers in this position involuntarily, while the comparable 1989 rate was 22.2%.

Part-time employment is largely a service sector phenomenon, although several of the service industries (distributive and business services, and public administration) reveal rates of part-time work well below average. Part-time work is most common in the two lower-tier service industries (retail trade and other consumer services) where almost one-third of workers are part-time. In these sectors, uneven levels of demand by consumers (for example, entertainment and food services in the evenings; shopping in the afternoons and evenings, and on weekends) provide a strong incentive for using part-time employees.

Education, health, and welfare also relies heavily on part-time workers - both teaching and nursing have high rates of part-time employment. Thus, while part-time work may have first become common in lower-tier service industries, it has also become quite common in upper-tier service industries.

Union members are only half as likely as non-members to be in part-time jobs. To some extent, this may reflect a failure of the labour movement to organize workers in lower-tier service industries - although, given the extent to which these industries rely on student labour, this would clearly be a difficult task. [\(11\)](#) However, the very low level of part-time work in the more unionized industries also suggests that some unions may have successfully opposed the introduction of part-time work arrangements.

The different forms of non-standard work overlap significantly. Own-account individuals were somewhat more likely than employees to work part-time. Among employees, 40% of temporary workers were in part-time jobs, compared with only 13% of those in permanent jobs.

## Multiple jobholding

During the reference week in early 1989, 1 in 20 Canadian workers reported holding more than one job, a figure only slightly higher than the 4.5% annual average from the 1988 LFS. No clear relationship linking multiple jobholding with age and sex is evident.

Industry differences (on the basis of main jobs) reflect a pattern similar to that observed for other forms of non-standard work. Perhaps because of the prevalence of part-time and temporary jobs, multiple jobholding is most common in other consumer services (10%) where 130,000 workers reported a second job.

Multiple jobholding could represent a full-time worker "moonlighting" at a second job, or a number of other possibilities. Unfortunately, the GSS cannot tell us exactly why people take a second job. Recent U.S. data reveal that 44% of multiple job-holders have immediate financial reasons (meeting regular household payments or paying off debts), while about 16% are using the second job to save for the future. <sup>(12)</sup> A similar set of motives would likely be found in Canada. <sup>(13)</sup> However, since most dual jobholders are supplementing a first full-time job, and since about one-third of multiple jobholders have a professional or managerial first job, not all multiple jobholders are in precarious financial or employment situations.

Nevertheless, multiple jobholding has been slowly increasing over the past decade. In 1980, 3.1% of all workers held more than one job. By 1988, this had increased to 4.5%. A similar trend has been observed in the United States, where the rate of multiple jobholding increased from 4.9% in 1980 to 6.2% in 1989.

## Part-year employment

A year-round job (either part-time or full-time) is the norm against which part-year or seasonal employment is defined as non-standard work. According to the 1989 GSS, 7% of all employed Canadians had part-year jobs at the time of the survey. <sup>(14)</sup> Again, young workers are over-represented. Almost one-third of all people typically working nine months or less during the year at their (main) jobs were under the age of 25. Across all age groups, women and men are equally likely to be in a part-year job. Among the young, men are more likely to report part-year work. In the 25 to 54 age category, women report a slightly higher rate of part-year work. The estimates for women aged 55 and older are too low to be reliable, but almost 1 in 10 men in this age group reported a part-year job.

The industrial distribution of seasonal work reflects a pattern more like self-employment than part-time work, temporary work, or multiple jobholding. Part-year work is most common in industries directly

affected by seasonal weather conditions: agriculture (12%), natural resource-based industries (12%), and construction (17%). However, the rate of part-year work is also above average in other consumer services (9%), continuing a pattern observed for other non-standard forms of employment. Again, weather could be the ultimate cause, with its effects on accommodation, tourism, and entertainment.

Industry differences can help explain the higher proportion of young workers in part-year jobs. Specifically, many young people are employed in the lower-tier services, and men aged 15 to 24 are also over-represented in the construction industry. Given that young workers are much more likely than older workers to be in part-time jobs, one would also expect to find the higher proportion (15%) of part-time workers in part-year jobs. The own-account self-employed are also more likely to work part-year (10%). The overlapping of different forms of non-standard work is again very apparent.

## All forms of non-standard work

If the five alternative employment situations were mutually exclusive, about 40% of employed Canadians would be in some form of non-standard work. Even with the overlaps identified above, almost one in three working Canadians have a non-standard job.



### Chart **Varieties of non-standard work, 1989.**

*Source: General Social Survey*

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It could be argued, however, that multiple jobholding should not be classified as non-standard work. For full-time workers, holding a second part-time or part-year job does not necessarily suggest employment insecurity. For workers holding more than one part-time job, this insecure employment situation would already be registered (as a part-time job) in the operational definition of non-standard work. Going one step further, own-account self-employment might also be removed from the definition since it does not necessarily signify employment insecurity. If this restricted definition of non-standard work is used, more than one-fifth of working Canadians report either part-time, part-year or temporary work ([Table 2](#)).



### Table 2 **Non-standard employment by age, sex and industry; currently employed, 1989**

*Source: General Social Survey*

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Whatever the definition, young workers are over-represented in non-standard work. Within each age category, women are more likely to report some form of non-standard employment. Removing own-account self-employment from the operational definition clarifies the sex difference in the risk of non-standard employment. It also illustrates the extent to which older employed men, compared with those aged 35 to 54, are in non-standard employment relationships, and at risk of becoming marginal labour force participants. (15)

Using the broader five-component definition, agriculture heads the list of industries providing non-standard employment. The three-component definition places agriculture back in the "normal" industry category, but other rankings are not disturbed. The two lower-tier service industries, retail trade and other consumer services, exhibit the highest rates of non-standard employment (35% and 39% respectively). One of the upper-tier service sectors (education, health, and welfare) also contains a large proportion of workers in non-standard jobs (29%), as does construction (25%), a traditional blue-collar, goods-producing industry.

## Conclusion

Alternatives to traditional full-year, full-time, permanent paid jobs appear to be increasing in Canada and other industrial market economies. Comparisons with earlier Canadian surveys reveal a slow increase in various forms of non-standard employment. But while the growth and extent of non-standard employment are noteworthy, the trend should not be exaggerated, particularly since the most common form of non-standard employment, part-time work, did not really increase its share of employment in the second half of the 1980s. Nevertheless, in 1989 more than one in five employed working-age Canadians held either a part-time, part-year or temporary job. Women and young workers were most likely to be employed in non-standard jobs.

The growth in non-standard employment is clearly part of the transition to a service-dominated economy. But one must also look beyond the service industries. Some forms of non-standard work (own-account self-employment and part-year jobs) have long existed in several goods-producing industries (for example, agriculture, natural resource-based industries, and construction). To some extent then, non-standard work also reflects Canada's long-standing reliance on resource-based industries.

However, since service industries account for 70% of all employment, they also contain the majority of non-standard jobs. Non-standard employment is most extensive in the lower-tier service industries (retail trade and other consumer services). But even this is an incomplete picture, since part-time and temporary work have also become more prevalent in the upper-tier services like education, health, and welfare.

What about the quality of non-standard jobs? Do they pay less, offer fewer benefits, provide less job security, or offer fewer career opportunities? Do Canadians employed in full-time, full-year, permanent jobs report a better match between their education and the demands of their jobs? Are non-standard workers less satisfied with their jobs? Are differences in work rewards between standard and non-

standard jobs as pronounced in the upper-tier as in the lower-tier service industries? These and other related questions could provide a basis for additional studies.

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## Methodology and definitions

The fourth General Social Survey (GSS) was developed around the general topic *Work and Education: Toward the Year 2000*. A total of 9,338 individuals, representing the non-institutionalized population (age 15 and older) of the ten provinces, were surveyed in February 1989. The response rate for this telephone survey was 80%.

This article considers only the currently employed (including students holding a job while attending school), as well as a small number who would normally have been working but were temporarily away from their jobs. It is also restricted to those between the ages of 15 and 64, even though a significant number of Canadians 65 and older are still active members of the paid labour force. Because of the size of the GSS sample, estimates for sub-groups of the 65 and older population cannot be provided.

Own-account self-employed (with no employees) are distinguished from employers (the self-employed who have others working for them) and employees (paid workers). Only the own-account self-employed are treated as non-standard workers. Temporary workers are those reporting a job with a specific end-date. The analysis of temporary work is restricted to employees (paid workers) since it is more likely that, for this group, temporary work represents employment insecurity (an essential aspect of the definition of non-standard work).

Any individual holding more than one paid job (full-time or part-time) was classified as a multiple jobholder. Following convention, individuals usually working less than 30 hours per week (across all jobs if holding more than one) were defined as part-time workers. Given the operational definition of part-time work as 75% of a (roughly) 40 hour week, a similar fraction was used to define part-year workers as those typically working nine or fewer months per year in their main job.

A ten-category industrial classification is used. Agriculture is distinguished from other natural resource-based industries (forestry, fishing, mining, petroleum, utilities). These two extractive industry groups, along with the transformative industries (construction and manufacturing) constitute the goods-producing sector. The service sector is sub-divided into six categories: distributive services (transportation, communication, wholesale trade); business services (for example, finance, insurance, services to business management); the education, health and welfare sector; public administration; retail trade; and other consumer services (for example, food and beverage, accommodation, recreational and other personal services).

This typology is very similar to the classification system used in the recent Economic Council of Canada discussions of employment in the service economy. The Council distinguished "dynamic services" (distributive and business services) from "traditional services" (retail trade and other consumer services) and "non-market services" (education, health and welfare, and public administration). Here, retail trade and other consumer services are labelled "lower-tier services" because of the evidence of fewer work rewards and lower skill requirements in these industries. The other four service industries are grouped into an "upper-tier" category.

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## Notes

### *Note 1*

See, for example, [International Labour Office](#) (1984 and 1985); [Economic Council of Canada](#) (1990); F. Piotet (1987) or [A.E. Polivka and T. Nardone](#) (1989).

### *Note 2*

See [Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development](#) (OECD) (1986); [C. Hakim](#) (1988) and [A. Dale and C. Bamford](#) (1988).

### *Note 3*

See [J. Rubery](#) (1988); [A. Pollert](#) (1988); [C. Lane](#) (1989); [A.E. Polivka, and T. Nardone](#) (1989); [M. Maguire](#) (1991) and [C. Tilly](#) (1991).

### *Note 4*

The effect on the financial security of families is ambiguous. Given the sharp increase in the proportion of multiple-earner families, non-standard employment may be providing jobs for individuals who might not otherwise be in the labour market. As well, non-standard work may be accepted in preference to no work.

### *Note 5*

See [G.L. Cohen](#) (1989).

### *Note 6*

See [F. Piotet](#) (1987); [A. Dale and C. Bamford](#) (1988); [C. Lane](#) (1989). Most of these estimates are from the mid-1980s, but presumably still reflect the current situation.

### *Note 7*

Since the 1989 GSS was completed during the winter, student summer employment would not be inflating the estimate of temporary work among youth.

**Note 8**

See [H. Pold](#) (Autumn 1990); for U.S. data, see [C. Tilly](#) (1991).

**Note 9**

See [M. Coté](#), (Spring 1990). However, the 1990 recession led to a further increase in part-time employment in 1990, see [P. Cross](#) (Spring 1990).

**Note 10**

Given the size of the GSS sample, estimates of involuntary part-time employment by age and sex are based on small sub-samples and, hence, are not very reliable. The estimates reported here are 1989 annual averages from [Statistics Canada](#) (1989).

**Note 11**

Students would not, necessarily, oppose union organizing attempts any more than would other employees. However, to the extent that students view their jobs as temporary, rather than as career beginnings, they would be less motivated to organize collectively. In addition, staff turnover is high in these industries, making union organizing drives all the more difficult.

**Note 12**

See [J.F. Stinson Jr.](#) (July 1990).

**Note 13**

See [M. Webber](#) (Winter 1989).

**Note 14**

For a discussion of year-round employment patterns in 1984 and 1985, see [R. Veevers](#) (March 1986). A direct comparison to the 1989 GSS is not possible, since this earlier report does not distinguish between those who "normally" work for less than twelve months and those who moved between employment, unemployment and labour market inactivity for other reasons. However, the Labour Market Activity Survey which has replaced the Annual Work Patterns Survey offers further potential for detailed analysis of annual work patterns.

**Note 15**

See [J. Parliament](#) (Spring 1987); [C. Lindsay](#) (Spring 1987) and [G.L. Cohen](#) (Spring 1991).

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Table 1

**Non-standard employment, 1989**

	Total employment	Own- account	Part-time employment	Multiple jobholders	Part-year employment	Temporary employment*
	'000					
<b>Total</b>	<b>12,468</b>	<b>858</b>	<b>1,905</b>	<b>635</b>	<b>878</b>	<b>799</b>
<b>Men</b>	<b>6,933</b>	<b>531</b>	<b>505</b>	<b>333</b>	<b>510</b>	<b>391</b>
15-24	1,151	57	352	48	164	151
25-34	2,057	126	72	104	113	112
35-44	1,805	154	--	86	95	52
45-54	1,183	117	--	73	72	27
55-64	736	77	36	--	67	48
<b>Women</b>	<b>5,535</b>	<b>327</b>	<b>1,400</b>	<b>302</b>	<b>368</b>	<b>408</b>
15-24	1,091	31	437	66	103	136
25-34	1,654	84	332	98	95	110
35-44	1,427	108	327	89	90	98
45-54	906	69	193	26	63	45
55-64	457	35	111	--	--	--
<b>Industry</b>						
Agriculture	278	124	--	--	34	--
Natural resource based	818	--	--	--	97	28
Manufacturing	1,779	39	71	88	103	73
Construction	626	81	35	--	107	69
Distributive services	1,326	86	89	54	88	50
Business services	1,337	123	135	78	48	52
Education/ health/welfare	2,050	77	484	143	127	184
Public administration	1,124	--	74	41	66	90
Retail trade	1,628	117	515	59	68	88

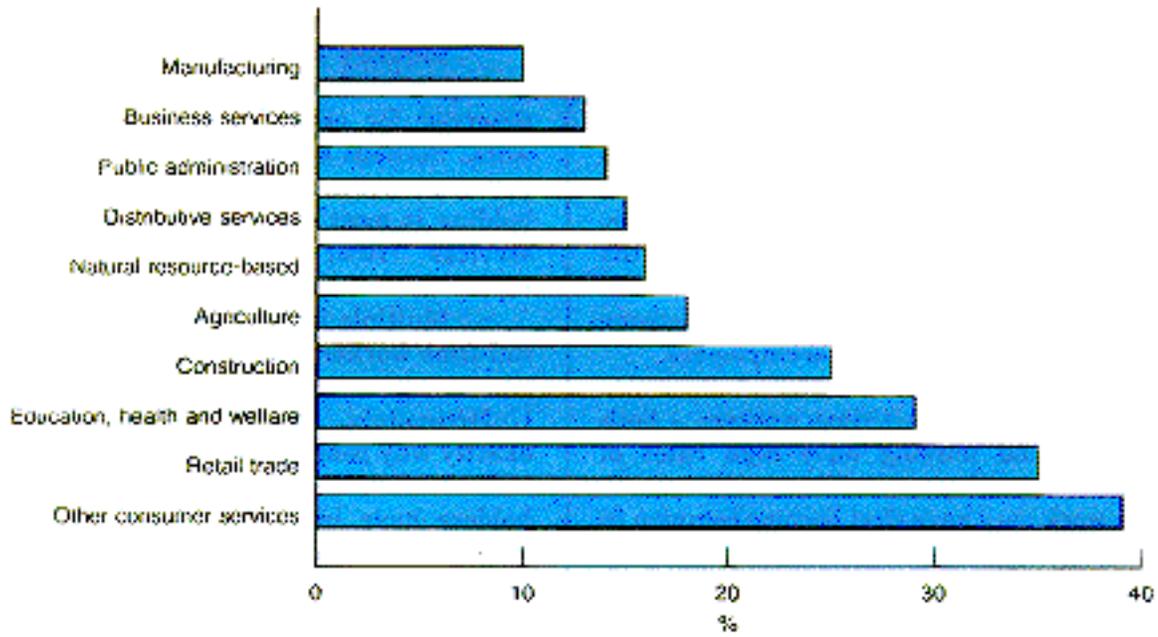
Other consumer services	1,337	152	424	130	122	136
<b>Size of firm</b>						
Less than 20	3,709	--	729	--	--	212
20 to 99	2,223	--	316	--	--	154
100 to 499	1,836	--	202	--	--	137
More than 500	4,536	--	618	--	--	274
<b>Employment status</b>						
Employee	10,647	--	1,671	528	756	--
Own-account	858	--	174	65	86	--
Employer	900	--	41	41	31	--
<b>Full-time/Part-time status</b>						
Full-time	10,525	--	--	514	590	--
Part-time	1,905	--	--	121	284	--

*Source: General Social Survey*

*\* Excludes own-account and employers.*

## Non-standard employment\* by industry, 1989

Lower-tier service industries had the highest incidence of non-standard work

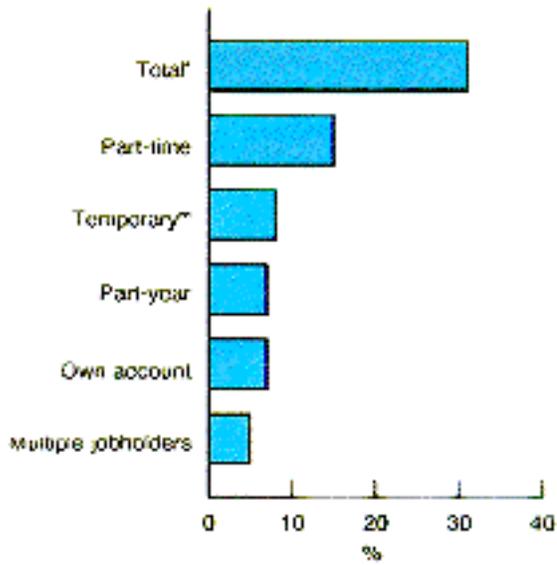


Source: General Social Survey

\* Comprises part-time, part-year and temporary work.

### Varieties of non-standard work, 1989

Almost one-third of working Canadians aged 15 to 64 have a non-standard job.



Source: General Social Survey

\* Persons in more than one category are counted only once.

\*\* Excludes self-employment.

Table 2

**Non-standard employment by age, sex and industry; currently employed, 1989**

	Total employment	Definition 1*	Definition 2**
	'000	%	%
<b>Total</b>	<b>12,468</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Men</b>	<b>6,933</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>16</b>
15-24	1,151	45	41
25-34	2,057	21	13
35-44	1,805	19	8
45-54	1,183	22	8
55-64	736	25	16
<b>Women</b>	<b>5,535</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>31</b>
15-24	1,091	51	48
25-34	1,654	31	25
35-44	1,427	37	29
45-54	906	33	26
55-64	457	37	30
<b>Industry</b>			
Agriculture	278	61	18
Natural resource-based	818	18	16
Manufacturing	1,779	16	10
Construction	626	35	25
Distributive services	1,326	23	15
Business services	1,337	24	13
Education/health/welfare	2,050	36	29
Public administration	1,124	18	14
Retail trade	1,628	42	35
Other consumer services	1,337	50	39

*Source: General Social Survey*

*\* Comprises any of own-account, temporary work, part-time work, part-year work, or multiple jobholding.*

*\*\* Comprises any of part-time, part-year, or temporary work.*