
by

Icarpson Joseph

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Icarpson Joseph
Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic was not the great equalizer that it was advertised to be. From its early onset, the Coronavirus was portrayed by some as a great equalizer as no one seemed to escape the health risks of the virus, nor the economic consequences of the lockdown measures imposed to contain its diffusion. However, it quickly became clear that the COVID-19 pandemic acted as a magnifying glass which served to amplify long-standing social inequities. This research project analyzes the subjective work experiences of workers to understand how these individuals experienced work inequities, in particular, during the COVID-19 pandemic. In doing so, this project revealed that elements of the Canadian labour market that had been broken long ago were magnified by the pandemic.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

“How is the pandemic going for you?” This is a question that I asked a cousin, and to this, he responded as follows:

“6 years with the same company and today, I was laid off along with 10 other employees. This was round one. If the situation doesn't improve soon, there will be additional layoffs. It's hard enough starting over after so many years, but now, with a pandemic, I just don't know what will happen next. I will lose most of my savings in the following months. Even if I wanted to sell my apartment and move, I couldn’t because of the virus. I'm literally stuck, and I have no idea what it's going to be like or how long it will take before we come out on the other side of this thing. I suspect it will be an employee's nightmare with few openings and a massive number of employees competing for a limited number of jobs. Everyone says the same thing, "It will be okay, everything will work out." How? Just how is it going to work out? I'm sick and tired of hearing those words that are meant to make the person saying them feel better. They aren't comforting. That's like “thoughts and prayers” – useless. I'm sad, depressed and terrified. Thanks, COVID-19” (Personal correspondence, 2022).

The following testimonial depicts a bleak reality that many Canadians have had to face due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The outbreak has raised significant labour issues within Canada. More specifically, the pandemic forced many employers and employees to reckon with the true nature of their relationship. In reflection, what have Canadians learned about work and labour thanks to the pandemic?

Research Problem

The COVID-19 pandemic in Canada

The COVID-19 pandemic is an ongoing phenomenon whose impact has been felt throughout Canada. The provinces of Ontario, Quebec, British Columbia and Alberta reported
the most cases of the virus, but even in the early days of the pandemic, cases had been reported in all of Canada's provinces and territories (Jesse Tahirali, 2020). The virus was officially identified in Canada on January 25, 2020, after an individual who had returned to Toronto from China, tested positive for coronavirus. The first case of community transmission in Canada was confirmed in British Columbia on March 5. As a result, all of Canada's provinces and territories declared states of emergency. These declarations resulted in social restrictions and changes to varying degrees, including school and daycare closures, prohibitions on social gatherings, closures of non-essential businesses and restrictions on travel (Slaughter, 2020). By the summer of 2020, Canada saw a decline in cases until the beginning of autumn, when there was a resurgence of cases in all provinces and territories (Kestler-D’Amours, 2020). On September 23, 2020, Prime Minister Trudeau declared that Canada was experiencing a "second wave" of the virus (Trudeau, 2020). New restrictions in the form of varied regional lockdowns were put in place by provincial governments as cases increased. By November, the federal government passed legislation to approve further modified economic aid for businesses and individuals (Kalinowski, 2020). Nationwide cases, hospitalizations and deaths spiked during the Christmas and holiday season in December 2020 and January 2021. Alarmed by this, Provincial officials implemented heavy restrictions such as lockdowns and curfews in affected areas. These lockdowns caused active cases to steadily decline. In mid-March 2021, during the third wave of the virus, cases began rising across most provinces west of Atlantic Canada, resulting in further lockdowns and restrictions in the most heavily populated provinces like Ontario and Quebec. In late April, the third wave spread to the Atlantic provinces. In response, Newfoundland and Labrador, Prince Edward Island, and Nova Scotia reinstated travel bans (Lowrie, 2021). Vaccines started to become available to the general public in early 2021. As a result, Canada
became one of the most vaccinated countries in the world, with a continually high uptake of the vaccine. However, despite the high uptake of the vaccine, cases began to surge amongst the unvaccinated population in provinces which had removed nearly all pandemic restrictions (Treble, 2021). During this fourth wave of the virus which began in early August 2021, provinces returned to pandemic restrictions, such as mask mandates. Additionally, the surge in cases was understood to be a "pandemic of the unvaccinated" and resulted in the introduction of vaccine passports (Jackson, & Local Journalism Initiative Reporter, 2021). By January 2022, all of Canada's provinces and territories were experiencing record-level case numbers, primarily caused by the SARS-CoV-2 Omicron variant, which caused provincial and territorial governments to reintroduce restrictions surrounding travel and isolation. However, by mid-February, active cases began to decrease resulting in almost all provinces and territories announcing plans to lift restrictions by early March or mid-March 2022 (Harris, 2022).

In summary, the COVID-19 pandemic in Canada could be understood as a long winter which tormented Canada for several years. Many were not able to withstand this "winter" as excess deaths were high across many provinces, and the related disruptions affected all parts of Canadian's lives. Including, and especially peoples' work lives.

*The Economic Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic in Canada*

The COVID-19 pandemic had a deep impact on the Canadian economy. The government's social distancing rules limited economic activity in the country. Companies started laying off a vast number of workers, and Canada's unemployment rate was 13.5 percent in May 2020, the highest it has been since 1976 (Larue, 2021). Many planned large-scale events were cancelled or delayed, including all major sporting and artistic events. These kinds of restrictions, compounded by travel restrictions resulted in grave damage to Canada's tourism and air travel
sectors. Other sectors were equally affected, with farmers fearing bankruptcy as COVID-19 impacted consumer behaviours. For example, in the early stages of the pandemic, Canadian grocery stores were the site of large-scale panic buying which led to many empty shelves. By the end of March 2020, most stores were only open to online customers with the exception of grocery stores and pharmacies, which implemented strong social distancing rules. By October 2021, employment levels recovered to those last seen before the pandemic, but gains were focused on part-time job growth. Overall, there remained 400,000 fewer jobs in comparison to the pre-pandemic trend line (Donaldson et al., 2021). For example, during the pandemic, WestJet froze all hiring and offered voluntary departure packages to cut 12 percent of its total employment capacity. Similarly, Air Canada announced that it would lay off 5,000 of its staff (Boynton, 2020). By the start of March 2020, the federal government announced a dramatic increase in applications for unemployment insurance, with over 500,000 Canadians applying in a single week. By the end of March, nearly one million Canadians applied for unemployment insurance in a single week and by April, unemployment claims in Canada reached around 2.13 million, representing roughly 11 percent of the labour force. On 6 April 2020, the Canadian government claimed that 3.18 million Canadians applied for unemployment benefits, with around 795,000 applying on 6 April alone (Matt & Parkinson, 2020). In retrospect, 44 percent of Canadian households experienced some type of job loss during the pandemic and the number of applications for emergency benefits due to the pandemic reached 6 million by April 2020. This number included those who applied through the employment insurance process (Harris, 2020).

All in all, the early days of the pandemic affected everyone, including the wealthy. However, the sense that the COVID-19 pandemic was a "great equalizer" did not last. In fact, in the wake of the implementation of reopening measures in Canada, it was clear that some workers
were exposed to much more physical and financial risk than others. Those most at risk seemed to be individuals doing "essential" or frontline, public-facing work. In this sense, this project's research problem concerns how individuals experienced these work inequities, and whether this was a new phenomenon related to the pandemic, or if the pandemic simply exposed existing inequities within Canada’s labour market.

**Research Question**

Therefore, in following the critical theme of the above problem, the research question that this project aims to answer is, how did the COVID-19 pandemic impact the subjective work experience of Ottawa workers? Analyzing the ‘subjective experience’ of participants can mean lots of things, but in the context of this project, I will be most interested in the ways that people understand the role work plays in their lives. More specifically, as this research investigates the topic of the subjective experiences of workers during the COVID-19 pandemic, this project will address the following lines of inquiry: (1) How have workers' hours of work been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic? (2) How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected the material or perceived benefits of work? (3) How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected the overall finances of workers? (4) How has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted individuals’ overall workload? The general focus of these lines of inquiry was concerned with describing the general impact that the COVID-19 pandemic had on the work experience of participants. In formulating these lines of inquiry, I aimed to address five dimensions of participants' work-life: (1) their work hours, (2) their overall finances, (3) their work benefits, (4) their workload, and finally (5) their work-life balance.

In approaching this study on the subjective work experience of Ottawa workers during the COVID-19 pandemic, I relied on an interpretive research philosophy to collect essential
qualitative data which covered participants' stories and experiences of the pandemic. Adopting a qualitative research approach enabled this project to analyze the above research question in a manner that goes beyond the impersonal economic data that was commonly discussed during the pandemic. Additionally, this research approach facilitated the study of the everyday realities of participants living through the COVID-19 pandemic and addressed important questions as they were experienced, which helped extend the depth and external validity of this project. This research project also adopted a phenomenological research design to understand and describe the experience of participants who worked and lived through the COVID-19 pandemic. In this sense, this project was able to make sense of participants' lived experiences by interpreting their feelings, perceptions, and beliefs to clarify the essence of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their work experience. In total, I interviewed eighteen participants, in Ottawa, Ontario regarding their work during the pandemic. Utilizing these interviews, I identified essential themes shared between the workers and then contextualized them to paint a clear understanding of this phenomenon and what it revealed about the nature of work during the COVID-19 pandemic. I relied on convenience sampling as a sampling strategy to identify participants. Additionally, these participants had to match the following research criteria; Anyone who had a job and was able to legally work in Canada over the past three years, able to speak English fluently and be at least eighteen years of age. Convenience sampling enabled the recruitment of a variety of workers whom I believe could provide an accurate description of the lived experiences of workers in Ottawa during the COVID-19 pandemic. The participants were divided into three main categories: (1) Full-time Workers, (2) Part-time Workers, and (3) Unemployed participants. Within these three main categories, the participants were further divided into six subcategories: (1) Government workers, (2) Healthcare Workers, (3) Education Workers, (4) Remote Workers,
(5) Gig Workers, and (6) Retail/Hospitality. The inclusion of these subcategories enabled this project to depict the lack of care placed on the well-being of individuals working in Ottawa during the pandemic as employers prioritized the production of labour over their employees’ well-being. In this sense, as my research question sought to investigate the topic of the subjective experiences of Ottawa workers during the COVID-19 pandemic, semi-structured interviews were utilized as they allowed research participants to answer questions that were sometimes personal in nature. Participants were willing to talk about their experiences despite the reality that some were clearly still affected by the disruptions of the pandemic. The interviews were conducted over Zoom to promote the advantage of being interactive with participants, which allowed for unexpected topics to emerge and to be taken up. The interviews were also audio recorded and transcribed to facilitate the analysis of the research data. Lastly, this research project used content analysis as a data analysis method. Specifically, with the use of NVivo, I identified and analyzed the presence, meanings, and relationships of certain themes in my data set. I then utilized the resulting data to draw parallels between my participants' subjective experiences and the information gathered in my literature review. In doing so, I contextualized the data.

All in all, by approaching this project's research question in this fashion, an interpretive analytical framework was constructed, which demonstrated how the subjective work experiences of Ottawa workers were negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Research Significance

As previously mentioned, the pandemic was not a great leveler but instead amplified inequalities within Canada. In his book “The Great Leveler,” Walter Scheidel, explains how throughout human history, there have been four types of events that have led to humanity's greater economic equality, those being: pandemics, wars, revolutions, and state collapses
(Scheidel, 2018). In this sense, the COVID-19 pandemic has been described in loose terms as a leveller or equalizer, both because the disease can strike anyone, and also because the lockdowns have led to widespread job losses and economic hardships across all ranges of income. However, this could not be further from the truth. Yes, in a medical sense, COVID-19 can be viewed as an equalizer as no one had immunity, initially. However, from a socio-economic standpoint, the type of jobs some individuals hold provide immunity as these jobs can help them weather the risks and consequences resulting from COVID-19 with varying degrees of protection.

More than one million jobs in Canada were lost due to social distancing and mandated work shutdowns. A further two million people saw their hours of work fall dramatically, implying that over three million Canadians were directly impacted by the pandemic (Lemieux et al., 2020). This government response of shutdowns and cutting hours was based on the assumption that the COVID-19 economic impact would be temporary and that freezing the economy until the storm had passed would allow Canada to start again where we left off. Lives were saved because of these measures. However, it's true that some people had to make more sacrifices than others. Often, these sacrifices impacted lower wage earners disproportionately, thus, fitting long-standing themes of inequity in Canada that have persevered throughout decades and continue to grow (Lemieux et al., 2020). For example, for countless Canadian families, occupying the lower end of wage earning means an insecure standard of living. The social response to this issue encourages families to ‘pull themselves up by their bootstraps.’ After all, the prospect of finding a new job which could provide a more secure standard of living brings a sense of hope to these families that things will be better. However, as a magnifying glass, the COVID-19 pandemic and its economic fallout revealed a fallacy within this capitalistic logic. The fallacy was that we were ‘all in this together.’ Some Canadians do professional work that is
flexible and supported by technology and computers, offering income well above average, security, health, a home with space, and a comfortable family life. In this sense, this type of work provides a degree of economic immunity from the impact of the pandemic. On the other hand, other types of workers who have been on the frontlines of this economic battle against COVID-19 were the young, women, those who work in part-time and temporary jobs, with no union contracts and lower wages, students and those who were already unemployed. This population of Canadian workers did not have the luxury of economic immunity during these trying times (Corak, 2020).

All in all, collectively facing a health risk that has spread across Canada has given Canadians the opportunity to build empathy for the people who face risks to their well-being due to the nature of working in lower and more precarious employment systems. Of course, it is good to thank nurses and grocery store clerks for their essential work, but it would be a disservice to these same workers for the Canadian government to hope to start up again where we left off before the economic impact caused by the pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed that inequities have been robbing many Canadians of security, prosperity, and dignity. Now, it is our responsibility to address the inequities which plague Canada’s labour market. This is where this research project comes in. The rationale behind this study is to shine a light on the subjective work experiences of workers in Ottawa during the COVID-19 pandemic. In doing so, this project aims to understand whose work experiences were negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and why. This study's true value comes from its place of origin. More specifically, from working within a scholarly community, this study will contribute to the accumulation of knowledge about the everyday issues that affected workers during the pandemic. The following
section will utilize our established contextual understanding of the pandemic to construct a theoretical basis which will aid in the analysis of our participants' subjective work experiences.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Pandemic as a Sociocultural Event

This research project will focus on Canada, but the following section will detail studies from various wealthy Western democracies which aided in dispelling the myth that the pandemic acted as a leveler or “equalizer” (Adams-Prassl et al., 2020) in society by exploring how the burdens of a crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic typically fall on the lower socioeconomic classes of society. The choice of sources reflects the importance of investigating other countries, in addition to Canada, to understand the full context of the issue at hand.

Health Disparities

A publication by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) on COVID-19 mortality rates in the United Kingdom found that the more deprived an environment was, the higher its associated mortality rate (Marmot & Allen, 2020), a finding that supports pre-existing notions on the socioeconomic determinants of health (Allen et al., 2017). For example, a review conducted in the UK in 2012 found a continuing increase in inequalities in life expectancy between more and less deprived areas (Marmot & Bell, 2012). These findings parallel a Statistics Canada report which discovered inequalities in COVID-19 mortality rates based on neighborhood types in Canada (Subedi, 2022). In this sense, it is also true in the Canadian Context that the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic were unevenly distributed throughout socioeconomic classes. The ONS reported that before the introduction of lockdowns, “only 10% of workers in accommodation and food service could work from home; 53% of workers in communication and information could work from home” (Marmot & Allen, 2020, p.682). Such a societal response
failed to take into account individuals of low socioeconomic status who are less likely to be holding jobs which would offer them the possibility to work from home, thus increasing their likelihood of being exposed to the virus and/or of experiencing financial hardship (Messacar, 2020)

**Financial Disparities**

A Statistics Canada report on the financial resilience and financial well-being of Canadians during the COVID-19 pandemic found that some segments of Canadian society had been particularly vulnerable to the financial impacts of the pandemic (Statistics Canada, 2021). The groups who reported heightened levels of difficulty were immigrants to Canada, persons identified as visible minorities and Indigenous peoples (Statistics Canada, 2021). Financial status is often linked to a person’s immigration status and citizenship. In May 2020, among individuals aged 15 or older, almost 27.8% of immigrants compared with 19.1% of Canadian-born adults who lived in a household reported that meeting their needs in terms of necessary expenses was difficult (Statistics Canada, 2021). This gap between Canadian-born and immigrants has persisted throughout the pandemic (Statistics Canada, 2021). Similarly, among the population aged 15 to 69 years, the share of persons whose households experienced difficulty meeting their financial needs was significantly higher for persons identified as visible minorities or reporting Indigenous identity than for other Canadians (Statistics Canada, 2021). For example, in July 2020, nearly 29.2% of those designated as a visible minority and nearly 28.7% of Indigenous people lived in a household that reported experiencing hardship compared to fewer than 15.9% of Canadians belonging to neither group (Statistics Canada, 2021). A recent Labour Force Survey article, focusing specifically on Asian Canadians, indicated that South Asian Canadians were twice as likely to live in a household reporting difficulty meeting essential financial needs
(29.6%), compared to Canadians who are not a visible minority (15.7%) during the three months ending in April 2021. Lower average hourly earnings for both South Asian men ($30.69) and women ($25.91), compared with men ($32.78) and women ($29.06) that are not a visible minority, were likely contributing factors to these financial difficulties (Statistics Canada, 2021). The findings of this survey were consistent with other research.¹

Similarly, workers with flexible jobs before the COVID-19 pandemic, have been most affected due to the loss of work and income (Spurk, & Straub 2020). These include self-employed people, on-call workers, self-employed people with personnel, people with part-time jobs, and temporary agency workers as they have a much higher risk of in-work poverty or social exclusion than employees with a full-time, open-ended employment contract (Spurk, & Straub 2020). For example, a study conducted in the Netherlands found that young people, particularly those working in the retail and hospitality sectors, were more likely to experience in-work poverty. Most workers in these two sectors are under the age of 30 and are often employed part-time. Due to the layered minimum wage system in the Netherlands, young people have quite low incomes even if they work full-time (Bekker et al., 2021). For instance, a 19-year-old earning at minimum wage level in 2020 would have a gross income of €1008 per month ($1483.10 CAD), which is below the low-income threshold (Bekker et al., 2021). The self-employed workers are especially vulnerable to the changing economy as they largely fall outside of the Dutch social

¹For example, Filipino Canadians seemed to struggle even more, with more than two-fifths (40.3%) of Filipino Canadians living in a household reporting financial difficulties during the three months ending in April 2021. On average, Filipino Canadians earned $23.63 per hour, compared with $30.95 for Canadians not designated as a visible minority. In summary, Filipino workers earned on average $0.76 for every dollar earned by non-visible minority workers (Statistics Canada, 2021).
security system (Bekker et al., 2021). Besides income insecurities, this group is at a higher risk when they become ill or reach the pensionable age (Bekker et al., 2021). An important vulnerability for young people and flexible workers is that they often are the first ones to become redundant during economic crises while having built little entitlements to social security (Bekker et al., 2021) While the Dutch system is structured differently, Canada has some demographic similarities which suggests more research on this topic is needed.

In summary, although the COVID-19 pandemic has been portrayed as the great equalizer, this section has demonstrated that not everyone was affected by the virus and its socio-economic consequences in the same way. Instead, the COVID-19 pandemic as a social-cultural event acted like a magnifying glass, amplifying existing social inequities. While acknowledging this, it is important to underline that the Canadian experience of the pandemic was much like other Western democracies in that the pain was unequally distributed. With this understanding in mind, the following theoretical framework will provide historical context drawn from previous studies of work detailing how people have come to both experience and understand work and its unequal nature in the social sciences.

**Theoretical Framework**

**The Political Economy of Work: Karl Marx**

As previously discussed, the burden of the consequences of a crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic is not divided equally and typically falls on individuals belonging to the marginalized groups of society. With this in mind, in this section of my paper, I aim to analyze Marxist theories to understand how they contributed to contemporary research on work. To achieve this, I will explore Marxist notions of value, alienation, and exploitation as they are most relevant to contextualize the work-based inequities observed during the COVID-19 pandemic.
Karl Marx: The Labour Theory of Value and Commodities

Commodities are objects that satisfy human needs and wants. Commodities are the necessary units of capitalism, which is in itself a form of economy based on the intense accumulation of such objects (Marx, 1933). The basic criteria for measuring a commodity’s value is its general usefulness, and what it does in the way of satisfying basic needs and wants. This usefulness is its use-value, a factor intrinsic to the commodity (Marx, 1933). Commodities also possess an exchange value, which is the relative value of a commodity in relation to other commodities in an exchange market. Exchange value is not intrinsic to a commodity. Instead, it allows one to determine what one commodity is worth in relation to another commodity (Marx, 1933). In a complex market, different commodities are measurable through money. Thus, exchange-value as monetary value is what one means when one says a commodity has “value” in a market (Marx, 1933). Commodities with different use-values can be measurable in the same units through a universal measure for value, expressed in terms of money, which corresponds to the amount of labour time that goes into the making of each commodity. Labour time is the only thing that all commodities with different use-values have in common and is thus the only criteria by which they are comparable in a situation of exchange (Marx, 1933). This is Marx’s labour theory of value. This theory implies that commodities have a social dimension because their exchange value is not intrinsic to them as objects but instead depends on the society’s entire division of labour and system of economic interdependence, in which different people produce different products for sale on a common market (Marx, 1933). Exchange value allows this market to function. Marx elaborates on the relationship between a commodity’s value and its social dimension by explaining that commodities are meaningful in two ways. First, as objects of exchange with a certain monetary value. Second, by reflecting not only the labour that went into
making them but also the social relations of production in which the labour was performed (Marx, 1933). This latter social aspect of commodities cannot express itself because, in a capitalist society, the quality of a commodity is thought to originate solely from its price, not from the labour that goes into its production (Marx, 1933). The fact that people are moved to mistakenly reduce the quality of a commodity to money alone leads Marx to argue that bourgeois economists, reduce economics and the production and exchange of commodities to the behaviour of money and in so doing always avoid looking at what commodities represent in social terms. In doing so, the bourgeoisie ignores the fact that commodities emerge through an inherently exploitative system of wage labour (Marx, 1933).

The labour theory of value is not Marx’s invention, originating instead from classical economist David Ricardo, who developed a labour theory of price, which states that the prices of commodities represent the labour that went into making them (Dooley, 2005). However, Marx’s labour theory of value differs from Ricardo’s and is given a drastically different significance within the larger context of his work. Marx’s focus on the nature of value is intended to show that the modern capitalist system of production and exchange is not what it seems (Dooley, 2005). Although economic activity is often reduced to the behaviour of money, to focus only on money is to barely scratch the surface. Production and exchange are social institutions, and their organization has social consequences. Capitalism, founded on a principle of private ownership, has the owners of the means of production (factories, raw materials) dependent on wage labour to create profits (Dooley, 2005). Modern economists do not accept the labour theory of value as an explanation of prices, but that is not the sense in which Marx intended the theory to be used. Marx’s point is that the production of commodities is a social process, dependent on exploitation
and giving rise to antagonistic relationships among classes, an idea that is not addressed at all in modern economics (Dooley, 2005).

In summary, the labour theory of value and commodities applies to a society where property-owning capitalists employ propertyless labourers to produce commodities for sale in the market. In this sense, workers produce commodities that do not belong to them. They are, therefore, alienated from the product of their labour (Dooley, 2005). In Canada, the labour theory of value is observed when workers are made to partake in precarious employment systems to supply a commodity to their employers. This commodity can equally take the form of services, such as hospitality or manufacturing (Ornstein, 2021). Nevertheless, modern workers provide this service to receive payment from their employers who sell the worker's services for a price in the market, thus, creating an intrinsically exploitative relationship between workers who depend on their employers for sustenance.

**Karl Marx: Exploitation and Alienation**

According to Marx, the exploitation of labour rests on two independent propositions: one economic, the other sociological. His theory of exploitation predates his theory of value (Screpanti, 2019). The economic proposition is Adam Smith’s doctrine of labour. This doctrine details how the origin of value corresponds to the notion that all commodities were in principle produced by labour and that labour is now and always has been the only active agent of production (Screpanti, 2019). The economic proposition explains Sir William Petty’s doctrine that past labour produced capital goods. If labour does not receive what it creates, then labour is exploited (Screpanti, 2019). The sociological proposition concerns the class structure of society, a class of propertyless labourers who work for wages and a class of property owners who receive
rent and profits. For Marx, the fact that property incomes exist proves that labour is exploited (Screpanti, 2019). Thus, the Marxian theory of exploitation has a logical as well as an empirical basis that is unrelated to the labour theory of value in exchange. If labour produces all commodities but does not receive all the income derived from production, then labour is exploited (Screpanti, 2019). In retrospect, from Marx’s perspective, the exploitation of workers is quite one-dimensional. If labour does not receive all the income from its production, then labour is exploited.

Nevertheless, in the modern context of this project, I will not restrict my understanding of exploitation to Marx’s understanding. Instead, I aim to modernize the notion and extend it beyond the analysis of monetary gains. For example, in Canada, one would say that a domestic worker who works within their employer's home, performing a variety of tasks, has entered an exploitative arrangement when they are forced to work long hours for little pay. While true, this analysis ignores different dimensions of exploitation, such as the fact that the wages paid to these workers are reflective of the undervaluation of said labour because it is associated with social reproduction (Picchio, 1992). This is of relevance to this project because many forms of work analyzed within this project are associated with tasks that are under the broad umbrella of social reproductive labour. For example, health care, education, and hospitality are all sectors that fit under the umbrella of social reproductive labour while also presenting conditions of precarity and exploitation, such as low wages. In this sense, it is by paying attention to these ignored dimensions of exploitation that this project diverges from Marxist understandings of work.

Alienation and exploitation are inseparably linked and may even be thought of as complementary principles (Mészáros, 1970). Alienation is both a pre-condition for exploitation and the result of it. Both are a result of the very foundations of capitalism, private property, and
the commodification of labour; one problem cannot be resolved without resolving the other (Mészáros, 1970). Marx defined alienation as the separation from the products of one's labour, and separation from one's very essence as a human being (Marx, 1977). He defined four types of alienation created by industrial capitalism, which divides the act of creating a product into a series of steps controlled by the capitalist owners of the means of production. Alienation from the product occurs when a person is neither the inventor nor designer of a product nor does that person receive any benefit from the existence of that product beyond what the capitalist is willing to pay them in wages (Marx, 1977). Put more simply, if the product is not made for the worker's use but made to produce a profit for the capitalist, the worker is alienated from what they make (Mosco & Fuchs, 2016). Closely related to alienation from the product, alienation from the act of production occurs when the worker in an industrial capitalist society is separated from the very act of production itself through the division and specialization of labour (Marx, 1977). In this sense, reduced from being the designer and creator of a product, a worker is confined to performing a series of repetitive acts with no sense of creating anything as an expression of themselves (Mosco & Fuchs, 2016). A worker experiences alienation from their species' essence when the division of labour inherent to the capitalist mode of production prevents the expression of one's human nature and so renders each individual into a mechanistic part of an industrialized system of production, from being a person capable of defining their value through direct, purposeful activity (Marx, 1977). Similarly, the alienation from other workers and society occurs when the capitalist economy's arrangement of the relations of production provokes social conflict by pitting workers against workers in a competition for higher wages, thereby alienating them (Marx, 1977). Thus, Marx believed that alienation was a necessary result of industrial capitalism. Equally, alienation was not only a socioeconomic
condition where value and the product are separated from the producers and are transferred from one class to another; more interestingly, the emergence of this concept and the reason to introduce it over and above exploitation in this research project is precisely to highlight the contradictions of capitalism from a humanist viewpoint (Marx, 1977). For example, in the modern context of this research project, alienation occurs when there is a loss of individuality throughout the production process. In this context, instead of the worker being a piece of a whole, they begin to lose their independence and become just another cog in the wheel of the modern labour market.

In summary, there are two ways that Marx's theoretical work contributed to contemporary research on work. One is an economic discussion about the labour theory of value. This theory still has some important lessons about how we understand the central place of labour in economic life. The second way Marx's theory contributed to research on work is the sociological understanding of the experience of labour that he outlined in his earlier works. The following section will utilize the aforementioned theoretical basis on the labour theory of value, exploitation and alienation as a tool to contextualize the historical emergence of labour movements.

**Labour Studies**

This section of the paper will connect Marx’s theory to the history of the labour movement in Canada. By using Marxist understandings of labour, its value, its exploitation and relatedly alienating nature, I will summarize the general history of labour movements, both in Canada and the United States, in order to historically contextualize our previously established
Marxist theoretical basis. The next section will then provide an account of how and why labour movements have struggled in recent decades.

**Labour Movements: Canada and the United States**

**1812-1902.** The history of organized labour in Canada goes back almost 160 years to the unions of skilled workers in Saint John, New Brunswick during the War of 1812. During this time, employees had their own types of organizing structures. To elaborate, they formed unions for different reasons, including fair wages and life outside work. The unions fought for their rights, ensured that there were good working conditions and ensured that the employees were paid well by their employers (Forsey, 1974). Analyzing the history of labour unions in Canada depicts how the unions evolved in parallel to our understanding of labour and its pitfalls. Early unions in Canada existed about 160 years ago under the Canadian Labor History (Forsey, 1974). During that time many unions were formed by different employees with varied skills, such as the tailor’s societies. Other smaller unions that existed include the masons, bricklayers, carpenters and even the shoemaker’s union. These unions were, however, short-lived. On the contrary, some unions persisted for so long that they even exist in the present century (Forsey, 1974).

During the rise of international unions, the Canadian Unionism Center moved to the central part of Canada. Some of the small, early unions merged to form the international unions. Of all the international unions that existed, the most important unions were the locomotive engineers, the typos cooper, Crispin, and the cigar makers. One of the largest and most influential unions was the Toronto Assembly. It was the reason for starting the first national central body (Forsey, 1974). The Canadian labour union was the national central body, which was organized in 1873, during a time when there were only about 100 unions in the country. The first union however had delegates from only fourteen of the unions. The union was hit by the economic conditions of
Canada during that time. However, some of the unions survived, including the branches of the international unions (Forsey, 1974). The Knights of Labour was a holy and noble order that was founded in the United States in 1869 and had district assemblies in that country and other countries such as Australia, Britain, Ireland and even New Zealand (Ross, 2023). The knights were the ones responsible for the organization of the men and women who were unskilled and small-town workers. The knights were also the ones who were responsible for coming up with the first Winnipeg and Montreal trades as well as the labour councils. It was also responsible for the second central labour union in the nation (Ross, 2023). In general, the aim of the unions during the period 1812 to 1902 was for the employees to get more of what they needed. First, they needed more money and as a result, formed the unions to demand higher payments. Secondly, they needed more leisure and more time for themselves and their families. The unions fought for the employees and ensured that there was collective bargaining, overtime, extra pay and higher rates (Eidlin, 2018).

1902-1960. 1902 was a major turning point for Canadian labour. In that year it was determined that organized labour in Canada would not be Canadian. Instead, for the foreseeable future, organized labour in Canada would be dominated by Americans in the form of the American Federation of Labour. Leaving the ascension of the American Labour Movement in Canada unopposed subsequently weakened Canadian labour as it became more divided than ever. New labour unions started emerging leading to Canadian labour being more regional than national by 1910 (Abella, 1975). Concerned with only protecting itself from these new unions, the labour center of Canadian workers, withdrew from developing new organizations and in doing so left hundreds of thousands of workers in the country unrecognized and at the mercy of anti-union business (Abella, 1975). Any type of legislation which could protect workers was
defeated on the grounds that it would discourage business investments. These conditions worsened at the end of 1912 and the pre-war depression settled in as unemployment skyrocketed while immigrants were still arriving in Canada. Hence, when the war broke out in 1914, organized labour in Canada was more occupied with the depression as it fought for jobs for its members (Abella, 1975). The year 1919 saw soldiers returning home after World War I to find high unemployment rates and inflation. They couldn’t get their jobs back and social tension was high. Workers in various trades wanted fair wages to earn enough to support their families in the changing economy. On May 15, 1919, workers walked off the job and marched into the streets of Winnipeg, leading to one of the biggest labour actions Canada has ever seen. Strikers included workers from both the private and public sectors and ranged from garment workers to police officers. However, on June 21, 1919, the Royal North-West Mounted Police and hired union busters’ rode on horseback and fired into a crowd of thousands of workers, killing two and injuring countless others. The infamous “Bloody Saturday” marked the end of the strike. This was the largest general strike in Canadian history and set the stage for future labour reforms (Thiessen, 2020). For example, during the economic depression of 1929-39, young, unemployed men had to work in government work camps for meagre wages in isolated locations. In pursuit of a living wage, workers in Vancouver abandoned the camps, launching a strike. After striking for two months with no relief in sight, they took their case directly to Ottawa, travelling by rail and on foot. This journey became known as the ‘On to Ottawa trek’ (Liversedge & Hoar, 1973). The trek was stopped by the RCMP on orders from Ottawa and after rioting and arrests of union leaders, the strike ended. Mackenzie King’s Liberals won the next election and legislated against the repressive conservative government, abolishing the camps (Liversedge & Hoar, 1973). This epic strike and trip captured the hearts and minds of Canadians and gave birth to unemployment
insurance in 1940 (Liversedge & Hoar, 1973). Canada was the last major Western country to adopt an unemployment insurance system. Today, we refer to this system as Employment insurance, also known as EI. Research has shown that EI was the single most important economic stabilizer in the past three recessions (Ferdosi, 2021). Similarly, the 1945 Windsor’s Ford strike had a comparable impact on the Canadian labour landscape. In more detail, six weeks after the strike, arbitrator Ivan Rand, a Supreme Court judge approved automatic dues check-off, which involves taking an amount of money from an employee's pay for membership in a union. His decision ruled that, because everyone in a workplace benefits from the union, everyone should contribute to the union (Parkes, 2010). Justice Rand believed the dues check-off would foster labour peace and a harmonious labour relations climate in Canada as unions could now cover the cost of bargaining, enforcing collective agreements, and campaigns that advance the interests of their members (Parkes, 2010). Pooling resources this way meant that workers could have the support they needed when voicing grievances, or when they were forced on strike or locked out without strike pay (Parkes, 2010). By the 1950s, the time had come for a single, country-wide labour organization to help unions work together around common goals. Industrial growth, the rising influence of “big business” and expanding government involvement in the social and economic life of the country demanded a strong, unified voice for working Canadians. That led to the creation of the Canadian Labour Congress in 1956 (Abella, 1975). Nevertheless, much work still needed to be done as in the 1960s, the exploitation of workers, especially immigrants, was still widespread. Many barely earned enough to support their families, lived in fear of deportation, and were forced to work in very unsafe working conditions. Many, unable to speak English, were unaware of any rights they did have. This issue became the catalyst for reforms in occupational health and safety which led to the passing of the Industrial Safety Act,
which later became the foundation of the Canada Labour (Safety) Code that set out laws and regulations for the safety of workers in Canada. As a result, by 1960, most of the major battles of organized labour in Canada had been fought and won as the Canadian labour movement had finally secured the power, prestige, and status it had been seeking for the past century (Abella, 1975). However, there is a need to acknowledge that this sense of victory would be diminished by the adoption of the Wagner model of labour law which disempowered Canadian unions by introducing restrictive notions such as the limitation on the right to strike (Tucker, 2014).

In summary, the Canadian Labour movement was not a ceaseless effort. Instead, such as a phoenix, it fell and rose from its ashes on several occasions over the past century. The history of Canadian Labour should be characterized by the theme of persistence, as even when faced with obstacles, labour movements kept their sight on achieving a better tomorrow for Canadian workers. However, has this “better tomorrow” been accomplished? Interestingly, when dissected, the historical context of the labour movement in Canada serves as an unfinished novel, missing its happy ending. Unfortunately, contemporary labour movements are left fighting far more complex labour issues, while wielding the same weapons, and the same arguments. The following section will situate us in recent times to investigate the contemporary sociology of work. In doing so, I will pick up where my analysis of the Canadian labour movement ended to create a sociological context which will introduce new labour-related issues facing Canadian workers.

**Sociology of Work**

Thankfully, critiques of capitalism seem to be back in fashion in public discourse. Along with it has come a renewed interest in the teachings of Karl Max. In this section I will pick up
where my research on labour movements left off, to paint a picture of the current landscape of the sociology of work. In doing so, I will discuss the genesis of the social inequities which were later amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic.

**The Rise of Polarized and Precarious Employment Systems**

The economic boom of the 1990s revealed a dark reality for modern Western society; in addition to the growing gap between rich and poor, the gap between high- and low-quality jobs expanded (Kalleberg, 2011). The postwar prosperity of the mid-twentieth century had enabled millions of American workers to join the middle class, but, by the 1970s this upward movement had slowed due to the constant disappearance of secure, well-paying industrial jobs. Since then, precarious employment has been on the rise, paying low wages, offering few benefits, and with virtually no long-term security. By the 1970s, government deregulation, global competition, and the rise of the service sector gained traction, while institutional protections for workers, such as unions and minimum-wage legislation weakened. Together, these forces marked the end of postwar security for workers (Kalleberg, 2011). The composition of the labour force in the United States is also of interest as the number of dual-earning families increased, as did the share of the workforce composed of women, non-white, and immigrant workers. Of these groups, Black workers, Latinos, and immigrants remain concentrated in the most precarious and low-quality jobs, with educational attainment being the leading indicator of who will earn the highest wages and experience the most job security and highest levels of autonomy and control over their jobs and schedules (Kalleberg, 2011). However, this is not a new phenomenon, precarious work conditions always existed for these groups which were excluded from the post-WWII standard employment relationship model. With Canada’s longstanding immigration policy aimed at bringing in ‘cheap’ labour, these workers were always engaged in
labour markets to supplement family incomes. In reflection, it is important to emphasize that work conditions were precarious far before the 1990s, bringing about the Employment Standards Act to create a basic floor of rights for workers who were not unionized (Fudge & Vosko, 2001). These conditions persist to this day, as crystallized by the Canadian Union of Public Employees which released a report which revealed that more and more Canadians are working in precarious conditions, employed in contract, temporary, and/or part-time jobs with low wages (CUPE, 2018). The increase has been concentrated in accommodation and food services, education, information, culture and recreation services among young workers aged 15 to 24 and older workers aged 65 and up (CUPE, 2018, p. 1). Additionally, The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives recently reported that among the university and college workforce, as many as half are employed in precarious conditions (Shaker & Shaban, 2018). A disproportionate share of those are the 68,000 CUPE workers employed in this sector (CUPE, 2018). Permanent jobs make up a declining share of the overall jobs in the postsecondary workforce, and they are being replaced by people working in temporary, involuntary part-time and multiple jobs. Those in precarious jobs also tend to be paid considerably less than those in permanent, full-time jobs and have much less in terms of benefits, job security and regular hours. Working-aged men aged 25-54 in part-time jobs are paid average wages of about $22 an hour, which in retrospect is only 71 percent of what those with full-time jobs get paid. Men and women in temporary jobs are paid less in comparison to those with permanent jobs, and significantly less if non-unionized. Workers in precarious jobs tend to be paid even less and unfortunately, women and racialized workers are much more likely to be employed in these types of jobs (CUPE, 2018).

Today, the polarization between workers with higher skill levels and those with low skills and low wages is more significant than ever. Statistics Canada’s annual Labour Force Survey
data reports employment for each of what Statistics Canada identifies as the 40 major occupations (Government of Canada, 2020). This enables them to observe employment trends in these occupations and overall patterns across the three skill groups over time at national and provincial levels (Government of Canada, 2020). The research revealed that Canada has not escaped the job polarization phenomenon. In the three decades since 1989, the share of mid-skilled jobs in Canada shrank from 58.5 percent to 52.6 percent. Unlike in other countries, however, the share of low-skilled jobs did not increase. In fact, the share declined by 1.6 percentage points in the three decades (Government of Canada, 2020).

Therefore, there is every reason to expect that the growth of precarious polarization of jobs will continue in parallel with the decline in job quality. This is, in part, due to fluctuations in the business cycle and economic restructuring which results in the disappearance of institutional protections for workers (Kalleberg, 2011).

**The Gloves Off Economy**

From workers without identifiable employers, unfair labour practices and the erosion of employer-based benefits are part of late twentieth-century employer strategies and practices that have helped create a steady erosion of labour standards in Western countries (Martelle et al., 2009). The “gloves-off economy" identifies a set of employer strategies and practices that either evade or outright violate the core laws and standards that govern job quality in Western countries. While such strategies are longstanding in sectors, such as sweatshops and marginal small businesses, they are spreading (Bernhardt et al., 2008). For example, Ontario has a growing share of private-sector employees earning low wages while not belonging to unions. This trend is fueled by changes in the structure of Ontario’s labour force in industries, including accommodation and food services, administrative services, and cleaning. Workplaces are being
transformed through an increase in contracting, franchising, and extended supply chains. These ways of structuring work contribute to the erosion of working conditions, characteristic of a “gloves-off economy”. This trend, driven by competitive pressures, has been shaped by an environment where other major economic actors, government, unions, and civil society, have either promoted deregulation or have been unable to contain gloves-off business strategies. Resulting in a labour market in the 21st century that is vastly different from previous labour markets in both legal and normative dimensions (Vosko et al., 2017).

While it is not clear exactly how many employers engage in these techniques or how many workers are affected, the numbers are substantial and have grown steadily since the 1970s. Labour relations are dynamic, and the “gloves-off economy” is a long-term late twentieth-century employer response to the successful unionization, pro-labour laws and employment practices established in the mid-twentieth century (Bernhardt et al., 2008, p. 222). This phenomenon and its legality, as well as its impact on work conditions, could be conceptualized through the notion of fissuring, coined by David Weil. Fissuring is the result of corporations increasingly distributing activities through an extensive network of contracting, outsourcing, franchising, and ownership. Through this, employees work for a loose network of middlemen or independent contractors who still monitor and control their work while removing the protections of labour law and the ability to fully enjoy the rewards of economic growth (Weil, 2014). This is the new reality for workers in the 21st century. For example, employers in residential construction, short-haul trucking and building services have successfully eroded workplace standards. All three industries were heavily unionized and were not easily off-shored, yet employers were successful in moving towards a subcontracting system that ultimately broke up union representation and with it reduced wages and benefits industry-wide. Additionally,
immigrant labour fills the ranks in these three industries only after they become de-unionized and deregulated, contrasting claims that immigrants are the source of declining workplace standards (Bernhardt et al., 2008). Compared with their European counterparts, North American employers have relatively low formal and informal employment standards. Nonetheless, these are increasingly and routinely evaded through subcontracting or simply violating the rules with little fear of government reprisal. Much of what is required to be provided by employers in other industrialized countries, such as health insurance or retirement plans, is offered voluntarily in Western countries. Over the last 30 years, fewer employers are offering these benefits or trimming them, pushing more and more economic and physical risks onto workers (Martelle et al., 2009).

Therefore, the stage had been set in the last decades for social inequalities to be worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic. The signs of a polarized and extremely unequal workforce had been right in front of our eyes, yet they were ignored by legislators and policymakers who were only focused on capitalist ideologies. This is where this study picks up. Through one-on-one interviews, it aims to shine a light on the subjective work experiences of frontline workers, public servants, and service industry workers in Ottawa who have been ignored during the COVID-19 pandemic. In doing so, I hope to understand whose work experience was deteriorated by the COVID-19 pandemic and why. Additionally, this study, as implemented, will benefit both workers and their employers in pursuing equal and fair treatment in work environments.

Chapter 3: Methods Section

Introduction

This research paper aims to examine the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the work experiences of workers. In doing so, I hope to shine a light on the underlying inequities within
the Ottawa labour market which were amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic. The following methods section will use both interpretive and phenomenological approaches to understand the experiences of workers. I will accomplish this by investigating how labour-related burdens of a crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic accumulated and affected the lives of people working in Ottawa. This methods section will be structured as follows; (1) Research philosophy, (2) Research approach, (3) Research design, (4) Sampling strategy, (5) Data collection and analysis techniques.

**Research Philosophy**

This research project relied on an interpretive research philosophy. The definition of interpretivism is a sociological method of research in which an action or event is analyzed based on the beliefs, norms, and values of the culture or society in which it takes place (Collins, 2010). I was interested in adopting an interpretive approach as a research philosophy for this research project because quantitative research seemed too impersonal and abstract. In some cases, quantitative research can be limited in its pursuit of concrete, statistical relationships, which could lead this project to overlook broader themes and relationships. By focusing solely on numbers, I risked missing surprising or big-picture information that could have benefited this project (Collins, 2010). On the other hand, interpretivism focuses on the subjective interpretations of people and cultures. The philosophy claims that these interpretations are more important than natural laws which are based on close observations of human nature. Additionally, interpretivism believes that reality is determined by the perspectives of individuals and their beliefs regarding their actions rather than the physical occurrence of the actions themselves. In this sense, if one has a proper understanding of these beliefs, one will be able to have a correct understanding of why individuals act the way they do (Collins, 2010). Therefore,
in adopting this research philosophy, I was able to collect essential qualitative data which covered my participant's stories and experiences of the pandemic which would have been objectively missed through other research approaches.

From an interpretive perspective, qualitative research can be defined as the study of the nature of phenomena, including “their quality, different manifestations, the context in which they appear or the perspectives from which they can be perceived”, but excluding “their range, frequency and place in an objectively determined chain of cause and effect” (Philipsen & Vernooij-Dassen, 2007, p. 7). This formal definition can be complemented with a more pragmatic rule of thumb: Qualitative research generally includes data in the form of words rather than numbers (Punch, 2013). Researchers conduct qualitative research because some research questions cannot be answered using only quantitative methods. Research problems that can be approached particularly well using qualitative methods include addressing questions that go beyond what is happening, to whom it is happening when it is happening, and why it is happening (Denny & Weckesser, 2019). Qualitative methods also allow researchers to gather deeper, richer information from respondents (Denny & Weckesser, 2019). For example, while quantitative research can measure the costs and benefits of implementing a certain piece of legislation, qualitative research can help provide a better understanding of the impact that said piece of legislation is having on specific groups of people (Denny & Weckesser, 2019, p. 7). Given that, a qualitative research approach is characterized by flexibility, openness, and responsivity to context, and that the steps of data collection and analysis are not as linear as they tend to be in quantitative research, this research project is best suited to an interpretive and qualitative approach. Using qualitative research allowed me to ask questions that could not be easily put into numbers to understand the lived experiences of my participants. Additionally, this
research approach enabled me to study the everyday realities of participants living through the COVID-19 pandemic and address important questions as they were experienced, which helped extend the depth and external validity of this project.

**Research Design**

This research project relied on a phenomenological research design to understand and describe the experience of participants who worked and lived through the COVID-19 pandemic. This approach is popularly used to study lived experience, gain a deeper understanding of how human beings think, and expand a researcher’s knowledge about a phenomenon. In more detail, by using a phenomenological research design I was able to study the lived experiences of my participants as they worked through the pandemic to gain deeper insights into how they understood those experiences. In this sense, I was able to make sense of my participant's lived experiences by interpreting their feelings, perceptions, and beliefs to clarify the essence of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their work experience.

This research project was designed to investigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on different dimensions of work. To achieve this, I aimed to capture the lived experiences of eighteen participants, who were Ottawa workers, by conducting semi-structured interviews. Before each interview, in accordance with my research ethics clearance, I informed participants of the confidential nature of this study to promote an honest and transparent data collection process. I asked questions which aimed to explore each worker's experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. I analyzed the notes from the completed interview with each participant and used them to develop new interview questions which addressed overlooked dimensions of this research project. Utilizing the completed interview transcripts, I analyzed this data and identified essential themes shared between the workers. At the end of the study, I then contextualized the
results to paint a clearer understanding of this phenomenon and what it revealed about the nature of work during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Sampling strategy**

This research project relied on convenience sampling as a sampling strategy. Convenience sampling is a type of purposive sampling that identifies people who match the predefined criteria needed to participate in a research project and who are also within the social orbit of the researcher. The main advantage of convenience sampling in the context of this research project was that the convenience sample allowed for a wider range of experiences among participants by targeting multiple types of workers. In layman's terms, it was a strategy that was more open-ended and exploratory (Walliman, 2021).

In the study, I interviewed a total of eighteen participants. Inclusion criteria included anyone who had a job and was able to legally work in Canada over the past three years. They also had to speak English fluently and be at least eighteen years of age. The recruitment occurred at Carleton and online. The recruitment process went as follows: 1) Recruitment posters were placed on billboards at Carleton University in accordance with Carleton University's posting policy; 2) Participants were also recruited through advertisements placed on social media platforms (i.e., Facebook groups, personal Instagram, personal Facebook etc.); 3) Snowball sampling was also used, where participants were able to tell others about the study, who may likewise be interested in participating; 4) Participants who called or emailed the primary researcher would also be invited to take part in the study.

**Participants Demographic Table**
My sampling strategy enabled me to interview a variety of workers whom I believe could provide an accurate description of the lived experiences of work in Ottawa during the COVID-19 pandemic. The above table provides a depiction of the participants included in this research project. As depicted, participants were divided into three main categories and then six subcategories. The three main categories divided my participants into (1) Full-time Workers, (2) Part-time Workers, and (3) Unemployed participants. Following this, we have six subcategories which are as follows: (1) The subcategory of Government workers refers to participants who worked for the federal/provincial/municipal government during the pandemic; (2) The subcategory of Healthcare Workers refers to participants who worked in the healthcare sector during the pandemic, such as government nurses; (3) The subcategory of Education Workers referred to participants who worked in the education sector during the pandemic, such as teachers; (4) The subcategory of Remote Workers referred to participants that worked remotely during the pandemic, such as government workers; (5) The subcategory of Gig Workers referred to participants who worked in the gig economy during the pandemic, such as food delivery drivers; (6) Lastly, the subcategory of Retail/Hospitality refers to participants that worked in the retail/hospitality sector during the pandemic, such as customer service representatives.

The inclusion of these subcategories meant that I was able to cover the following range of experiences in my sample: (1) I gained insight regarding how the move to remote work
impacted Ottawa workers' experience of alienation from other workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. (2) I received a clear description of the negative impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on the workers who remained in the healthcare sector throughout the pandemic. In more detail, this sample shined a light on how healthcare workers were strained in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. (3) I gained insight into the impact of the poor implementation of the “getting back to normal” process, and how it placed educators in a vulnerable position, including a heightened risk of contracting the COVID-19 virus while simultaneously removing safeguards meant to protect their well-being. (4) I gained insight into the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on the work-life balance of Ottawa workers. More importantly, this sample aided in dispelling the myth that remote work during the COVID-19 pandemic should be considered a benefit since it also carried a negative impact on Ottawa workers. (5) This sample provided the project with a description of the dire reality of working within a precarious employment system during the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, it provided this research project with a rationale as to how company closures caused by the COVID-19 pandemic affected the polarized labour market in Ottawa. (6) I gained insight into the work experiences of the everyday worker who often served as the first point of contact for customers during the COVID-19 pandemic. In this sense, this sample helped depict the lack of care towards and concern for the well-being of individuals working lower-paying jobs as employers prioritized the production of labour over their employee’s well-being. (7) Lastly, my participant pool included members of both the private and public sectors of the labour force. In understanding that these sectors hold different degrees of unionization, this study was able to shine a light on how work experiences in these sectors were differentially impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

*Data collection methods*
The methods of qualitative data collection most commonly used in qualitative research are case studies, observations, semi-structured interviews and focus groups (Denny & Weckesser, 2019). This research paper utilized semi-structured interviews for data collection. Qualitative interviews can be described as “an exchange with an informal character, a conversation with a goal” (Hijmans & Kuyper, 2007, p. 45). Interviews are used to gain insights into a person’s subjective experiences, opinions, and motivations, as opposed to observed behaviours. Interviews can be distinguished by the degree to which they are structured (i.e., a questionnaire), open (e.g., free conversation or autobiographical interviews) or semi-structured, which combines a pre-determined set of open questions with the opportunity for the interviewer to further explore particular themes or responses (Denny & Weckesser, 2019). My interviews were semi-structured, and my interview guide included open-ended questions about people's work experience. The predefined topics in my interview guide were concerned with describing the general impact that the COVID-19 pandemic had on the work experience of my participants. In doing this I focused my effort on addressing five dimensions of my participant's work-life: (1) their work hours, (2) their overall finances, such as their remuneration or pay, (3) their work benefits, including not only extended health and leave provisions, but equally their sense of purpose and belonging within the workplace, (4) their workload, and finally (5) their work-life balance. This topic list was derived from labour-related themes noticed in the literature review, such as the exploitation of labour and the rise of polarized and precarious employment systems (Kalleberg, 2011). The topic list was also adapted and improved throughout the data collection process as I learned more about the interviewee's lived experiences. In conducting interviews for these five dimensions, I planned on asking my participants open-ended questions such as: Could you describe your experience at work both before and during the COVID-19 pandemic?
Qualitative studies that utilize open-ended questions allow researchers to take a holistic and comprehensive look at the issues being studied because open-ended responses permit respondents to provide more options and opinions, giving the data more diversity than would otherwise be possible (Walliman, 2021). This was true in my research, as participants were more than happy to share their work experiences and thoughts on the pandemic due to the almost therapeutic nature of this research project. Across interviews, the focus on the different categories of questions was alternated and some questions were skipped altogether if the interviewee was not able or willing to answer the questions. The interviews lasted an hour and were conducted and recorded over Zoom and then transcribed and edited for accuracy as conducting them in written format would impede the interactive component of the method (Denny & Weckesser, 2019). In comparison to written surveys, the interviews conducted in this project had the advantage of being interactive which allowed for unexpected topics to emerge and to be taken up. More specifically, they allowed my research participants to answer questions that were sometimes personal in nature, enabled me to ask follow-up questions, and allowed participants to expand on provided explanations. For example, the interactive interviews produced a discussion on the topic of suicide in relation to a worker's alienation from their species-essence. Such a topic would be hard to reach while using other data collection methods. The interviews were also audio recorded and transcribed to facilitate the analysis of the research data.

Additionally, this research project utilized elements of an individualized approach to data collection. This individualized approach is a feature of semi-structured interviews as it enables participants to share their stories while simultaneously reflecting on them. In the context of this research project, utilizing this individualized approach meant that I essentially provided an in-
depth description of my participant's lived work experiences. This description came from a combination of data collected during the interviews, during which the participants reported the details of their point of view of working during the COVID-19 pandemic. I then interpreted the descriptions that came from these details. The individualized approach method often involves simply reconstructing the history of a single participant using the idiographic approach (Walliman, 2021). Because of this, the interview was an extremely effective procedure for obtaining information about the participants as it provided this information in a qualitative form. In this sense, the individualized approach allowed me to investigate the subjective work experiences of my participants during the pandemic in far more detail than might be possible if I were trying to deal with a large number of research participants.

Data analysis methods

This research project utilized content analysis as a data analysis method. Content analysis is a research tool used to determine the presence of certain words, themes, or concepts within some given qualitative data (Michael Hammond, 2020). Using content analysis, I quantified and analyzed the presence, meanings, and relationships of certain themes in my data set. As an example, I evaluated the language used within certain cases to search for sentiments of betrayal and abandonment from my participants toward their employers. I then made inferences about the prevalence of those sentiments within the texts to make a logical conclusion regarding the impact that the pandemic had on employer-employee relations. Sources of data for this analysis method were semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions. To analyze this data using content analysis, I coded the interview transcriptions using NVivo into manageable code categories for analysis. In more detail, I identified the key themes in the data gathered from my participants. I compared prevalent codes in their transcripts with previously mentioned theoretical perspectives.
to support explanations of their experiences. To do this, I used NVivo, a qualitative data analysis application that enabled me to collect, organize, analyze, and visualize the interview data. Using NVivo I developed a code book to organize the data. A code in qualitative research is a word or phrase that summarizes or captures the essence of a portion of data. Coding is the analytical process of categorizing data. Once the text was coded into code categories, I then further categorized it to summarize data even further. I then utilized the resulting data to draw parallels between my participants' subjective experiences and the information gathered in my literature review. In doing so, I contextualized the data (Pugh, 2013).

**Conclusion & Summary**

This methods section started by restating the research objective and presented an interpretive analysis framework in response to the research question. This analytical framework was useful because it showed that peoples' experiences with the pandemic were generally congruent regarding the antagonistic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their work experiences. More specifically, it highlighted pre-existing themes of exploitation, alienation, polarization and precarity within Canada’s labour market which were amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic. The following section will further discuss these findings.

**Chapter 4: Analysis section**

**The Rise of the Pandemic Gloves off Economy and its Impact on Workers**

The following analysis section will be divided into two segments. The first of these segments will analyze the subjective experiences of Ottawa workers during the pandemic. The first portion of this analysis will relate the previously established notion of the gloves-off economy to highlight how Ottawa workers experienced estrangement from their identity and life purpose due to the exploitation and alienation to which they were exposed during the COVID-19
pandemic. The second portion of this analysis will utilize the aforementioned themes of exploitation and alienation in the context of workers’ experiences to frame the problem of precarity in Ottawa’s labour market.

**The Gloves Off Economy and the Steady Erosion of Labour Standards During the Pandemic**

When talking about the gloves-off economy, I am identifying a set of strategies and practices used by employers to stretch the boundaries of what seems acceptable under the core laws and standards that shape workers' experiences. This phenomenon parallels what US economist David Weil refers to as fissuring. Fissuring is the result of corporations increasingly distributing activities through an extensive network of contracting, outsourcing, franchising, and ownership. Through this, employees work for a loose network of middlemen or independent contractors who still monitor and control their work while removing the protections of labour law and the ability to fully enjoy the rewards of economic growth (Weil, 2014). While this sort of erosion of standards and deterioration of work conditions is very often found in places that are not industrial, such as the service sector or agriculture, evidence shows workers seem to be experiencing a more subtle deterioration in working conditions across sectors in Canada (Martelle et al., 2009). For example, according to the Report of the Expert Panel on Modern Federal Labour Standards, the nature of work in Canada and other advanced economies has changed dramatically in the past 50 years. Relatively fewer workers have standard employment (full-time, permanent paid work) while non-standard employment (such as part-time and temporary paid work, and self-employment) make up a greater proportion of the workforce. The report adds that income inequality, wage stagnation and declining unionization rates are all characteristics that suggest an erosion of labour standards which should be considered when contemplating the enactment of new policies aimed at protecting workers, particularly those who
are most vulnerable to exploitation (Report of the Expert Panel on Modern Federal Labour Standards, 2019). This phenomenon has been worsened by the pandemic, which has caused economic disruptions for many Canadian employers, such as the federal and provincial government, corporations, and small businesses. In reflection, the pandemic had adverse effects on both public and private sector employers, subsequently negatively altering various dimensions of workers’ lives due to eroded labour standards.

A category of eroded standards observed in this project was eroded safety standards. The following cases exemplify instances of such erosion in which both participants 5 and 9 suggest that the pandemic became an excuse for their employers to be less concerned with workplace safety. One example of the erosion of safety standards was observed in the case of participant 5, who detailed instances in which there was a lack of enforcement of pandemic-related safety standards at the hospital in which she worked. Specifically, participant 5 explains how her employers failed to enforce pandemic safety regulations of quarantine and isolation due to a lack of available employees. Participant 5 further elaborates, claiming that she experienced many instances in which she and her coworkers were encouraged to come to work even though they displayed evident symptoms of COVID-19. Similarly, participant 9, who briefly worked at a kennel at the start of the pandemic speaks of similar treatment at the hands of her employers. She claims to have noticed that in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, in instances in which her colleagues were off from work due to COVID-19, others in the workplace were left to both ’pick up the slack” and complete additional duties, which they were often not trained for. The dangers of such a work environment were crystallized as participant 9 recounted an experience in which one of her colleagues was gravely injured due to an interaction, she had with a client’s dog who displayed extremely aggressive behaviour. In this instance, the employer requested that the
colleague complete this duty without the necessary training to maintain health and safety in the workplace. Both of these cases display an erosion of safety standards during a period of economic disruption. In these circumstances, employers became less concerned with safety standards because of structural issues like staffing levels which caused managers to become overwhelmed. In such a state, employers endangered their employees by prioritizing labour productivity over workers’ well-being. In the end, the experiences of participants 5 and 9 illustrate a factor which is essential to this research project. This is because as the pandemic raged on and disrupted Canada's economy, it also disrupted and changed the assumptions that these participants had about their workplace. The following four sections will outline some of the critical ways that my participant's experiences and perceptions changed for the worse.

**The Weaponization of “Getting Back to Normal”: Part 1**

The phrase “getting back to normal” was common during the pandemic, but in this research, I am referring to a narrative which was prevalent in several of my interviews. This narrative referred to how the process of “getting back to normal” during the pandemic had various negative impacts on workers. Before exploring this point, it is important to clarify that this phenomenon of “getting back to normal” was first observed at a time during the pandemic when the implementation of COVID-19 pandemic response measures, including vaccination, had led to a decline in the number of cases, thereby paving the way for the easing of health restrictions and a gradual return to normal life for Ontario citizens. For Ontario, this would occur in a three-phase reopening plan that lifted public health restrictions based on vaccination rates, among other indicators. A CBC news article detailed how Ontario would not be returning to the colour-coded pandemic framework that imposed varying restrictions on different regions as it enabled too many people to travel to public health units where restrictions were loosened.
Instead, this new three-stage reopening plan would be based on evidence and clear metrics and driven by the continued need to ensure that any ongoing transmission is limited (Gunn, 2021). The first stage involved the province reopening outdoor recreational facilities with some restrictions, and some non-essential retail outlets with 15 percent capacity limits, while allowing outdoor gatherings of up to 10 people, and outdoor restaurant dining with a maximum of four people at a table. The second stage further expanded outdoor activities and resumed some indoor activities with smaller numbers of participants. It also allowed outdoor gatherings of up to 25 people, outdoor sports and leagues, non-essential retail at 25 percent capacity, public libraries, and the resumption of personal care services where masks could be worn, as well as indoor religious services with capacity limits of 15 percent. The third stage further expanded access to indoor settings with restrictions, including where there are larger numbers of people and where masks could not be worn. That included gyms, cinemas and performing arts centers, as well as indoor dining and museums, with capacity limits.

This plan of “getting back to normal” detailed by the Ontario provincial government suggests a society ready to get back to a life without the fear of COVID-19. In reality, the smooth progress implied by this plan could not have been further from the truth. On the contrary, results from the interviews conducted in this research project reveal a situation in which workers felt endangered by a provincial government, which prioritized “getting back to normal” over the safety of its workforce. For example, participant 1, who worked at a hardware store during the pandemic described an incident prior to the 2021 Christmas season, which saw a dramatic rise in the number of COVID-19 cases in Ottawa. Participant 1 details how he personally observed a dramatic increase in colleague absences from work due to COVID-19. According to participant 1, during this phase of “getting back to normal,” some fellow workers at the hardware store were
very scared and cautious, while others were generally unsafe and operating on a more casual basis regarding mask-wearing at the workplace. With some workers objecting to pandemic regulations, participant 1 explained how a new factor of fear was introduced at work as colleagues became fearful of contamination by the COVID-19 virus via reckless coworkers or clients, which subsequently was detrimental to their quality work as they lost trust in the capability of their employer to create clear rules and safe conditions while following through with the ‘back to normal’ plans. Similarly, participant 6, who was a teacher during the pandemic also experienced this sentiment of feeling rushed into the process of “getting back to normal” during the pandemic. Interestingly enough, as a teacher, the participant received the benefit of taking sick leave with no impact on pay during the early stages of the pandemic. However, this benefit was quickly taken away as part of the “getting back to normal” process. This put participant 6 at risk of contracting the virus, they claimed while receiving little support from the government when it came to recovery.

For these participants, the process of “getting back to normal” did not hold the well-being of Ottawa workers as a priority but, instead, exposed them to elevated risks of contracting COVID-19 as employers failed to create clear rules and safe conditions in their workplace. While this observation alone is interesting, more importantly, it stripped away the impression that work was merely an exchange of labour and time for money/compensation but instead was exploitative in a Marxian sense. The pandemic made this reality particularly apparent, as various protections that were intended to offset or ameliorate the social costs of exploitation were eroded. By comparing participants’ experience of labour standard erosions during the pandemic with Karl Marx’s work on the notion of exploitation, we can interpret the process of “getting back to normal” as a process that fostered exploitative work environments. These exploitative
work environments pushed Ottawa workers to produce a product while not receiving the full benefits and protections of a safe work environment associated with that labour. This was illustrated by the work environments of participants 1 and 6, who had to take on the extra work of managing workplace health and safety, in addition to their normal work.

**The Conveyor Belt Effect**

“Sometimes it felt as if I was on a conveyor belt, doing just enough work to sustain myself along the pandemic, and fitting in sleep and family time somehow as well.” This sentiment was shared by participant 13 while describing his overall workload as a server in a restaurant in Ottawa during the COVID-19 pandemic. Later in his interview, participant 13 further elaborates on this sentiment by explaining how the COVID-19 pandemic drastically changed the social aspects of his workload at the restaurant as he no longer served tables. Instead, participant 13’s job changed from walking around, chatting, having a good time, providing good service and receiving tips per table to becoming an “assembly line” worker who only focused on packing up food and passing it to someone who was taking it out the door without receiving a tip. In this case, the enjoyable social aspect of his job disappeared while the labour intensified due to the increasing demand for takeout and cleaning duties caused by the pandemic.

The case of participant 13 and his experience of conveyor belt work depicts an exploitative work environment in which Ottawa workers are pushed to stay in a changed work situation that placed more demands on them, without any type of extra compensation to offset this. For example, in the case of participant 13, the aforementioned exploitative employment system is exemplified by the way in which participant 13’s workload increased while the perceived benefits of socializing and tips disappeared due to the pandemic. In basic terms, participant 13 was doing more while getting less.
Signs of alienation from the art of production are depicted in the case of participant 13. The art of production is the societal use and ownership of the elements of goods and services. This term depicts who controls the land, labour, and capital in society. According to Marx, the product of a worker's labour under a capitalist system results in the worker feeling alienated as the product of their labour is felt to belong to someone else and is simply a way for the worker to meet their physical needs or purely for wages. In the case of participant 13, as the pandemic and the increased cost of living in Ottawa introduced a “survival” dimension to workers' lives, workers produced labour to survive and meet their physical needs during a time of increasing uncertainty caused by the pandemic. Thus, participant 13’s case reflected a common sentiment that the pandemic took away a number of enjoyable factors from people's jobs. When people work, they get compensation in terms of pay, but there are also "soft" benefits that come with certain jobs (e.g., social, creative, or entertaining elements). For my participants, it was clear that if you strip away those soft benefits, the job can feel monotonous. As such, individuals feel like they are on a conveyor belt (i.e., go to work, go home, go to work, go home, etc.).

**The Demise of the Work-Life Balance of Ottawa Workers: Remote Workers**

All workers that I interviewed faced the challenge of finding the right work–life balance during the pandemic. The ability of workers to deal with the successful combination of work, family responsibilities, and personal life is crucial for both employers and family members of employees. Nevertheless, this ability was threatened during the COVID-19 pandemic as a portion of Ottawa workers were forced to work remotely. Initially, there were expectations surrounding the ability to work from home and it could promote work–life balance as it was meant to provide workers with the autonomy to structure their workday so they can be their most productive, get their tasks done efficiently, and make time for activities outside of work.
However, over time, factors which stood in stark opposition to work-life balance were revealed. Remote employees were only one notification away from the employer, and uncertainty related to the COVID-19 pandemic created more stress. As many employers and employees were not prepared for this sudden change, many mistakes were made, which further intensified the issue of work–life balance. For example, participant 6, who worked as an elementary school teacher during the pandemic details how her work hours increased during the COVID-19 pandemic. Remote work additionally exacerbated the challenge of keeping healthy boundaries between work and home. She further elaborates on this by explaining how a change from working in person to working remotely required her to take extra preparation time to get ready to teach her classes. Online learning required her to develop new materials and strategies to engage students and meet their needs outside of the class. She adds that she also spent extra time online with students to help them with their work and give them feedback that would normally be done during school hours. Additionally, participant 6 explains how when schools transitioned back to in-person learning during the pandemic, it also required more work and more preparation for teachers. For example, she explained how her workload during in-person learning during the pandemic involved preparing individual materials and learning manipulatives for each student, as students were not allowed to share materials and sit closer than a meter apart. Also, with social distancing requirements, participant 6 explained how she had to develop different types of lessons and modes of learning compared to before the pandemic. Unfortunately, this case of an increase in work hours which negatively impacted work-life balance is not a singularity within this study. All other participants that I interviewed and who worked remotely reported a worsened work-life balance during the pandemic. Additionally, it is important to acknowledge that this is a partly gendered phenomenon. In more detail, this situation involves three issues: 1)
the increase in work hours, 2) the blurring of boundaries, and 3) the overlap between work and childcare work/family obligations. Unfortunately, with social pressures forcing women to undertake the gendered expression of the motherly figure, working from home for female workers often intersects with “wifely duties.” This in turn leaves their work-life balance to further deteriorate in comparison to their male counterparts. Nevertheless, it must be recognized that care obligations were increased for all the following workers, including those single parenting or caring for other dependents, or those in same-sex relationships or families constituted in different ways from the heteronormative one. These findings are further supported by an article which discovered that working from home in the context of intensified workloads, increased employer monitoring, social disconnection and blurred boundaries between work and personal life collectively generate the reduction of employees’ perceived work-life balance (Adisa et al., 2022). In this sense, the experiences of boundary erosion, time porosity, work-life conflict, etc. during the pandemic were prevalent for all workers.

Subsequently, a system of remote work which blurs the lines between home and work can make it very difficult for workers to ‘switch off,’ creating a lack of boundaries between home and office. This in turn gives way to an exploitative system of labour which pushes full-time workers to provide more labour than they are used to in the form of longer hours while losing their work-life balance in return. Additionally, it can often be a lonely or isolating experience to work from home as many feel disconnected from the office culture. This experience was parallel to the case of participant 11, a public servant who was instructed to work from home during the pandemic. Participant 11 details how she and many of her colleagues struggled with the transition to remote work as working in smaller teams took both the social and community aspect out of their labour. In this sense, Ottawa workers who worked remotely during
the pandemic experienced alienation from other workers. More specifically, this type of alienation occurs to workers when employers organize workers in specialized groups. While it may be efficient for employees to work within a specialty, especially during the pandemic, there’s a danger of employees feeling like they’re missing out on bonding with others, impacting their sense of belonging within the workplace.

**Pandemic Limbo and its Impact on Workers**

The pandemic caused workers' lives to be put in limbo as they waited for a resolution to the COVID-19 pandemic. Further and importantly, workers had the status of their employment severely changed by the COVID-19 pandemic, ranging from a loss or a change of employment where they were forced to face and accept an uncertain future plagued by the dangers of COVID-19. Will I go back to work? How will I afford to survive? Will I survive this? All of these questions depict the bleak realities faced by workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, participant 8, who worked for a small business that declared bankruptcy at the start of the pandemic went into debt due to her loss of employment. This loss of employment left this participant with no benefits or severance pay. To add salt to the wound, this participant was misled with promises of a quick return to work but instead received news that the company had declared bankruptcy. As they were kept in the dark regarding their work status during the pandemic, this participant did not feel supported by their employer. Interestingly, in this case, participant 8 did not feel overwhelmed by the workload associated with their job during the pandemic like other Ottawa workers interviewed. Instead, participant 8 felt overwhelmed and scared by the burden which came from being newly unemployed during the COVID-19 pandemic. This sentiment was caused by the stress of maintaining stability at a time of extreme uncertainty. Unfortunately, as a newly unemployed student, the realities of the pandemic limbo
affected participant 8’s mental health as she described feelings of loneliness and boredom. Cut off from the rest of the world, participant 8 was left to worry about her finances alone as she described days blending within themselves and feeling as if she had no purpose since life was at a literal standstill. This testimony by participants exemplifies an aspect of the alienation of workers caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. More specifically, participant 8 experienced this alienation in relation to the psycho-social role and function of work, as they were denied the sense of belonging it normatively provided. In this sense, in an employment system plagued by the possibility of the loss of employment, Ottawa workers can become estranged from this essential source of social identity.

**Detailing the Framework of Both the Precarious and Polarized Employment Structure in Ottawa**

In summary, the COVID-19 pandemic has given rise to the erosion of labour standards characterized by both the exploitation and alienation of workers. This observation is based on the participant's own lived experiences. The second section of this analysis will utilize the aforementioned themes of exploitation and alienation observed in the context of the interviewed Ottawa workers to frame the broader systemic or structural realities of the labour market.

**The Great Divide: Ottawa Employees Vs. The Provincial Government**

While coding and analyzing the gathered data from the interviews, I noticed that a prevalent phenomenon presented itself in several cases. This phenomenon involved workers not feeling external support from their employers and the provincial government when facing the negative impact that the COVID-19 pandemic had on their work experiences. For example, participant 13, who worked at a restaurant during the COVID-19 pandemic describes the uncertainty that he experienced in relation to if and how he would be able to support himself
financially based on whether his restaurant would be open or closed. In more detail, since the provincial government dictated if and when the restaurant would be open or closed for public safety concerns, there was a lot of turmoil regarding his financial security. Although most of the time throughout the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, his restaurants would get notified of unforeseen closures, the notifications came less than 48 hours before the enactment date, leaving little time for workers to prepare for a change in work hours. On the topic of unexpected long-term closures, participant 13 elaborates that due to the several waves of the pandemic lasting three to four months, the status of being closed or open would interchange rapidly with short notice. The case of participant 13 is representative of a larger body of Ottawa workers who shared the sentiment that they were abandoned by the provincial government and left to face the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic alone, characterized by precarious employment which offered inferior hours and compensation. In the case of participant 13, this precarious employment system presented itself in the lack of secured hours and wages that he experienced while working at a restaurant during the COVID-19 pandemic.

*The Weaponization of “Getting Back to Normal”: Part 2*

As previously mentioned, when speaking about the weaponization of “getting back to normal,” I am referring to instances during the COVID-19 pandemic in which the process of “getting back to normal” had a negative impact on workers. The process of “getting back to normal” did not hold the well-being of workers as a priority. Instead, it exposed them to a higher risk of contracting the virus while withholding proper support apparatuses. While this observation alone is interesting, its external validity depicts a feature of work during the pandemic that utilized the process of “getting back to normal” to place workers in a position in which they felt pressured to partake in a precarious employment system due to a job scarcity
mindset caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, participant 4, who worked at a restaurant at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic but later became an Uber driver after losing his job, explains the great level of stress created by losing employment during the COVID-19 pandemic. He explained how embarrassed he felt about not having a job while seeing his friends and family members working. He adds that he felt a sense of defeat in accepting government-sponsored aid during the COVID-19 pandemic. These sentiments of shame and defeat pushed participant 4 to sign up to become an Uber driver which in turn exposed him to an increased risk of contracting COVID-19. Unfortunately, from the time of the start of his employment as an Uber driver, participant 4 detailed three different instances in which he contracted COVID-19 due to the lack of enforcement of COVID-19 regulations associated with his job. In this sense, there are two types of "weaponization" involved in this analysis. The first was about stripping away the everyday protections that make workers feel safe. This second sense is about the broader place of workers in the labour market. Here in the case of participant 4, we are addressing the rollback of emergency measures. In short, both the scarcity mindset and the weaponization of “getting back to normal” pushed workers, like participant 4, to pursue precarious employment to obtain a sense of certainty in uncertain times caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Musical Chairs: Change/Loss of Employment During the Pandemic and the Rise of Precarious/Polarized Employment Systems

Another prevalent pattern I noticed throughout the interviews was instances in which participants who first had part-time jobs, often changed jobs throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, I also noticed how several Ottawa part-time workers who did not hold essential jobs lost employment during the COVID-19 pandemic. In this sense, the experiences of
my participants did not necessarily support the broader media narratives about a "hot" job market where everyone seemed to be getting whatever job they wanted (Patel, 2022). These patterns were reinforced by the closure of many businesses that went bankrupt during the COVID-19 pandemic. As certain industries struggled to keep up during the COVID-19 pandemic, workers were forced to change jobs in order to make a living. This vicious cycle was normalized in previous decades by the rise of the gig economy in which workers rely heavily on temporary and part-time positions filled by independent contractors and freelancers rather than full-time permanent employees (Heing, 2020). Gig workers gain flexibility and independence but little or no job security. For example, in the case of participant 3 who lost employment forcing him to work several delivery jobs during the COVID-19 pandemic, he explained the sense of anxiety that he felt in working for food and parcel delivery companies which offered no health or job security at a time where his duties increased his chances of contracting COVID-19. On this topic, participant 3 details an instance in which he started displaying symptoms of the COVID-19 virus before one of his scheduled outings for a parcel delivery company. While he did in fact follow pandemic regulations and notified his employer that he was showing symptoms of the COVID-19 virus, his employer notified him that failure to meet his quota of deliveries for the day would result in the termination of his employment from the company. Having two children and a wife to support, participant 3 details having no choice but to go to work to deliver his parcel and disobeying pandemic regulations due to the fear of losing employment.

While this case may seem extreme, it perfectly exemplifies the dangers associated with pandemic-exacerbated prevarication, in which employers’ deception exposes workers in precarious employment to elevated risks. More specifically, as individuals lose their jobs, they are pushed to seek precarious employment such as part-time jobs, self-employment, fixed-term
work, temporary work, on-call work, and remote work. This becomes an issue as these precarious systems of employment offer perilous compensation, hours, and security. In this sense, workers who change or lose their jobs are further exploited. Additionally, the case of participant 3 highlights the rise of a polarized employment system in Ottawa. Many of my participants changed jobs during the pandemic but not all of these new jobs were a step up. This is an important finding as it emphasizes how the pandemic caused the loss of a significant number of jobs characterized by good working conditions. In exchange, the labour market is left with an increasing number of bottom-level jobs, requiring few skills while providing less security.

Polarized Employment Systems and the Rise of Frustrated Workforce

In the same context as the rise of precarious employment systems, the conducted interviews have illustrated the rise of a frustrated workforce during the COVID-19 pandemic. As previously discussed, job polarization has been occurring in Canada for the last three decades, though less intense when compared to the U.S. Overall, Canada has seen a 7.5-percentage-point increase in high-skilled occupations and declines in mid-skilled ones (Speer, 2021). This phenomenon can also be referred to as the ‘hollowing out of the middle,’ where the availability of mid-skilled jobs is significantly reduced. In this sense, the distribution of jobs in Canada prior to the COVID-19 pandemic also represented a major economic, political, and social development as there was less demand for mid-skilled workers in the labour market. Now, with the added aggravating factors associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, Ottawa workers face upheaval as the loss of jobs with fair wages that could provide financial security for less educated workers raises the prospect of an increasingly unequal Canadian society. For example, referring to the previous case of participant 3, who lost employment forcing him to work several delivery jobs
during the COVID-19 pandemic, the participant details a time in which he worked as a manager at a retail store before the COVID-19 pandemic. This job was a dream for him since it required no post-secondary school education. Nevertheless, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the managing job he held so dear was taken from him in an instant as his employers declared bankruptcy. In the case of participant 3, the job search in Ottawa was scarce as middle-class jobs requiring a moderate level of skills seemed to disappear, relative to those at the bottom, requiring few skills, and those at the top, requiring greater skill levels. Due to this, participant 3 was pushed to seek precarious employment as a parcel and food delivery driver which paid poorly when compared to his previous middle-class job as a retail manager. For participant 3, what he perceived as being mistreated quickly turned into disdain for the labour market as a whole. Similarly, in the case of participant 16, who was a teaching assistant at Carleton University during the pandemic, the frustration she felt towards the labour market quickly turned into mobilization as she and other union members entered a strike seeking better pay in an increasingly more polarized labour market.

**The Demise of the Work-Life Balance of Workers: Non-Remote Workers**

Interestingly, I had assumed that the prevalent theme of Ottawa workers' work-life balance deteriorating during the pandemic would mostly apply to remote workers who were ordered to work at home in accordance with pandemic regulations. Contrary to my assumption, the interviews demonstrated that a worsened work-life balance was also a pattern in the case of non-remote workers. In the case of these workers, this pattern was caused by the constant fear that completing their employment duties would expose them to an increased risk of contracting COVID-19. In this case, the possibility of contracting COVID-19 would not simply impact them at work but would also have negative ramifications outside of their work life as they risk
bringing COVID-19 back home with them. For example, in the case of participant 10, who worked as a receptionist at a recreational center during the COVID-19 pandemic, working in person and being at a heightened risk of contracting COVID-19 from her clientele meant that she had to stop making contact with her grandparents for long periods of time as their age placed them at a heightened risk of mortality if they contracted COVID-19. On this topic, participant 10 goes on to explain how difficult this time of the pandemic was for her since she had such a close bond with her grandparents. However, due to health risks associated with her work, she had to cut off part of her life which she deemed as being priceless to both her physical and mental well-being. Tragically, for her, this story did not have a happy ending as she ended up losing one of her grandparents due to an autoimmune disease at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The case of participant 10 depicts clear polarization in the Ottawa labour market during the COVID-19 pandemic. This polarization was caused by the way that this new dimension of fear of bringing back COVID-19 into one's personal life is unevenly distributed between job types in the Ottawa labour market. This is interesting because it illustrates how for non-remote, workers, the negative work-life balance issues were less about the total number of hours that they worked, but about the way that the safety implications of working with the public took over other parts of their lives. This fear was not shared throughout Ottawa’s labour market as good jobs offer employees the option to work remotely, which significantly reduces the risk and fear of bringing back COVID-19 into one's personal life.

**The Performative Activism Behind Pandemic Financial Support Programs**

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government of Canada publicly took strong, immediate, and effective actions to protect Canadians and the economy from the impacts of the global COVID-19 pandemic. This decision was made under the premise that no Canadian should
have to choose between protecting their health, putting food on the table, paying for their medication, or caring for a family member. Thus, to support workers and help businesses keep their employees, the Canadian government proposed legislation to establish the Canada Emergency Response Benefit. This taxable benefit would provide $2,000 a month for up to four months for workers who lost their income as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Canada Emergency Response Benefit would be a simpler and more accessible combination of the previously announced Emergency Care Benefit and Emergency Support Benefit. The Canada Emergency Response Benefit would also cover Canadians who have lost their job, are sick, quarantined, or taking care of someone who is sick with COVID-19, as well as working parents who must stay home without pay to care for children who are sick or at home because of school and daycare closures. The Canada Emergency Response Benefit would apply to wage earners, as well as contract workers and self-employed individuals who would not otherwise be eligible for Employment Insurance. Additionally, workers who were still employed, but were not receiving income because of disruptions to their work situation due to COVID-19, would also qualify for the Canada Emergency Response Benefit. This would help businesses keep their employees as they navigate the COVID-19 pandemic while ensuring they preserve the ability to quickly resume operations as soon as it becomes possible.

On paper, the Canada Emergency Response Benefit program assisted many Canadians in facing the COVID-19 pandemic. However, it also had serious gaps that negatively affected some of the more vulnerable citizens. More specifically, several interviewed workers who became unemployed due to the COVID-19 pandemic reported receiving nothing from the Canada Emergency Response Benefit during the first wave of the virus. Participant 17 explained how he did not meet the eligibility threshold of earning at least $5,000 in 2019 since he worked gigs that
did not make him more than $5,000 annually. This caused participant 17 to be considered ineligible for the Canada Emergency Response Benefit despite working in unsafe conditions which included proximity to others who might be ill. In this sense, for gig workers such as participant 17, the Canada Emergency Response Benefit was nothing but a performance which truly offered no support in their cases. Similarly, some workers such as participant 15 who faced unemployment in 2020 without being officially laid off were prevented from accessing government support. In this case, participant 15, who had not lost his job but had his hours cut, but still made more than the $1,000 cut-off, could not apply for the Canada Emergency Response Benefit causing him to struggle to access food, personal protective equipment, and other scarce necessities at the height of COVID-19’s first wave. In a sense, for some participants in this study, these financial support systems such as the Canada Emergency Response Benefit only contributed to the reinforcement of an existing inequitable labour market as gig workers were denied government aid and were further pushed into low-skilled jobs with little to no security.

**General Discussion Section**

In summary, the first segment of this analysis section discussed the lived experiences of Ottawa workers during the pandemic. Using the gloves-off economy as a theoretical basis in connection to participants' experiences of exploitation and alienation, a vicious cycle was identified. This cycle involved an environment governed by gloves-off doctrines which reinforced the conveyor belt effect in workplaces. This metaphor refers to more than just individuals working on a conveyor belt. The more powerful message that this metaphor delivers is that in the absence of the "soft" benefits that come with employment, work environments become increasingly production and capital-driven, as opposed to human-centred. As a result, workers' experience could be best described as monotonous. It is this experience that reinforces
the feeling that workers themselves are on a conveyor belt. This feeling is directly linked to the gloves-off economy as the erosion of safety standards is often connected to the absence of "soft" benefits within a conveyor belt work environment. Both notions are intrinsically linked and are the genesis for the creation of an exploited and alienated workforce. The second section of this analysis utilized the aforementioned themes of exploitation and alienation observed in the context of the interviewed participants to frame the broader systemic or structural realities of the labour market. With this, we come to the logical realization that the COVID-19 pandemic reinforced the establishment of a polarized and precarious labour market. The labour market was polarized in the sense that contrary to the broader media narratives about a "hot" job market, the participants had difficulties finding employment security as the gap between the number of low-paying and high-paying jobs increased throughout the pandemic. The labour market was precarious in the sense that low-paying jobs offered little sense of security to the participants, often placing them in situations that risked their financial, physical, and mental well-being. In the end, in contrast to narratives that portrayed an economy and government which were for the people, the lived experiences of workers portrayed a bleak reality where capital interest was prioritized on the back of Ottawa workers with little regard for their well-being. Instead of supporting the most vulnerable during the pandemic, inequities were exacerbated rather than tended to. The COVID-19 pandemic was not the cause of such realities, instead, it only highlighted an already broken system for which band-aid solutions are no match.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

In brief, this research project analyzed the work experience of individuals who worked through the COVID-19 pandemic. This task began by understanding how the pandemic served to amplify social inequalities within Canada’s labour market by leading the Canadian economy into
a recession. This recession was in part caused by the government's social distancing rules which limited economic activity in the country and resulted in increased unemployment rates (Larue, 2021). Unfortunately, this burden was placed unevenly on Canada’s workforce, with many experiencing inequities within their work environments during the pandemic. These findings directly opposed the myth that the COVID-19 pandemic was a great leveller, as indeed from a medical sense, COVID-19, would impact everyone equally since no one had immunity. However, from a socio-economic lens, the type of jobs some individuals held provided immunity by reducing one’s exposure to the virus. In this sense, it is within this fallacy that this research project found its raison d'être, providing workers with a voice to describe their work experience throughout the pandemic.

Next, a theoretical basis was constructed to contextualize the unequal treatment of workers within Canada's labour market. This began by establishing a Marxist understanding of labour, its value, its exploitation and its alienating nature. In more detail, it was explained that there are two ways that Marx's theoretical work contributed to a contemporary understanding of work in the context of this research project. One is through an economic discussion about the labour theory of value. Through this theory, we established that In Canada, the labour theory of value is observed when workers are made to partake in precarious employment systems to supply a commodity to their employers. This commodity can equally take the form of services, such as hospitality or manufacturing. Nevertheless, modern workers provide this service to receive payment from their employers who sell the worker's services for a price in the market, thus, creating an intrinsically exploitative relationship between workers who depend on their employers for sustenance (Ornstein, 2021). In this sense, the economic discussions provided this project with important lessons about how we should understand the central place of labour in
economic life. Secondly, Marx's theory contributed to this project by providing a working definition of exploitation and alienation which governs the experience of labour. Through this, we were able to establish that the exploitation of workers is multidimensional, in the sense that many forms of work analyzed within this project were associated with tasks that are under the broad umbrella of social reproductive labour while also presenting conditions of precarity and exploitation. Additionally, we established that alienation occurs when there is a loss of individuality throughout the production process or labour or services. In this context, instead of the worker being a piece of a whole, they begin to lose their independence and become just another cog in the wheel of the modern labour market. In this sense, Marx's theories and concepts contributed to this project by providing a sociological understanding of the experience of labour. Subsequently, this theoretical basis was utilized to explore the history of labour movements in Canada and trace its plight back to modern labour-related issues facing Canadian workers. This included a discussion about how the history of Canadian labour should be characterized by the theme of persistence, as even when faced with obstacles, labour movements kept their sight on achieving a better tomorrow for Canadian workers. This was observed through their tireless fight to provide Canadian workers with better pay and improved working conditions. However, it was established that contemporary labour movements are tasked with fighting far more complex labour issues in the face of a Canadian labour market characterized by precarious and polarized employment systems which plague workers with increasing economic and physical risks (Martelle et al., 2009) In this sense, by utilizing this theoretical and sociological basis, we developed an understanding of contemporary labour.

Finally, this brings us to the results of this research project, which through the use of an interpretive analytical framework, revealed the antagonistic and exploitative nature of Canada’s
labour market. For example, the interview with participant 11, who was a full-time government worker, provided insight in regard to how the move to remote work was experienced as a form of alienation from other workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. This finding was important because it dispelled the preconception that remote work was a benefit, a belief that was proliferated on social media. Moreover, the interviews of both participant 5 and participant 18 who worked in the healthcare sector during the pandemic seem to confirm the media stories about burnout and an overwhelming sense of stress which were prevalent in the healthcare systems available workforce (Sestito et al., 2021). The identification of this issue illuminated the stress that the pandemic placed on the healthcare sector which struggled to keep up with public demands due to a declining workforce. The interview of participants 6, 12, 14 and 16 who were all full-time education workers during the pandemic exposed the impact of the poor implementation of the “getting back to normal” process. More specifically, these interviews demonstrated how this process placed educators in a vulnerable position, as they experienced heightened risks of contracting the COVID-19 virus while simultaneously experiencing the removal of safeguards meant to protect their well-being. In this sense, these interviews revealed an employment system in which educators were trapped, fearing for their health and well-being. Interviewing participants 3, 4, and 17 who worked gigs during the pandemic revealed the dire reality of working within a precarious employment system which does not provide protection and security to their workers during a global pandemic. Interestingly enough, these interviews also shed light on how company closures caused by the COVID-19 pandemic intensified job precarity and polarization in the Ottawa labour market. As individuals lost their jobs and were faced with a labour market with reduced job prospects, individuals were pushed to acquire lower-skilled jobs with low compensation, inadequate working hours, and poor job security.
Lastly, interviewing participants 1, 2, 9, 10 and 13 who worked in retail and hospitality during the pandemic revealed how the everyday worker, who often served as the first point of contact for customers during the COVID-19 pandemic, were exploited by a labour market that prioritized the accumulation of capital over their well-being.

All in all, in contrast to dominant narratives which portrayed an economy and government which were for the people, these interviews revealed the lived experiences of the real workers who had to get up every day and face the true realities of the COVID-19 pandemic. These shared experiences paint a bleak picture of Canada's labour market, revealing that this system had been broken long ago and remains so.

Although social sciences may not produce life-saving vaccines, the value of this domain should not be discounted. The analysis and insights social science research generates can guide and target insights from the ‘natural’ sciences. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, there is no point in devising lockdowns that nobody will follow or developing a vaccine that nobody will take. This is where social scientists can help policymakers and their natural science colleagues develop solutions that people are able and, crucially, willing to follow through on. In this sense, work by social scientists is of value because they tell us important things about human behaviours during monumental sociocultural events like the pandemic. Social science research also has an urgent role to play in ensuring that the voices of communities affected by an issue are represented in discussions and that relevant stakeholders are able to be involved in decisions that affect them. In this sense, social science research, like this project, acts as a powerful catalyst for social change as it provides a voice to the voiceless. Following the tradition of critical social science research that has placed an emphasis on social justice, this project provided a unique opportunity to address injustices by mediating what marginalized groups within Ottawa’s labour
force seek to express. Therefore, social science research need not bring dramatic change to be valid. After all, David defeated Goliath with a slingshot and a small stone. In the same way, the culmination of small increments of progress is all that is needed to topple a broken employment system, as proven in the history of labour movements in Canada. In hindsight, as much as the original mission statement of this project was to analyze the impact of the subjective work experience of Ottawa workers through the COVID-19 pandemic, this project evolved into a conduit for social change by providing a voice to a group of workers whose experiences are important for social change. With this, the voices of Ottawa workers will be the spark which ignites further efforts to achieve equal and fair treatment in work environments across Canada’s labour market. In this sense, the participants’ experiences are a continuation of labour history in Canada. Just as their predecessors did, Ottawa workers are realizing what truly needs to be done and have already taken action to empower themselves by resisting the system which seeks to take advantage of them. To see this, one needs only to look at the case of participant 13, who after realizing that he could not rely on the Canadian government and his employer to prioritize his well-being, left the restaurant where he worked to obtain his real-estate certification. Thus, workers such as participant 13, are demonstrating their resistance to the current labour market just as their predecessors did by voting with their feet and leaving their jobs.

**Key Takeaways**

In conclusion, the COVID-19 pandemic did not cause the precarious and polarized employment system which currently dominates Ottawa’s labour market. Instead, it served to highlight a system which has been designed to seek profit on the backs of an unsuspecting working class. While this research project may not completely solve this issue, I believe that it provided key takeaways which would aid in efforts to improve working conditions within
Canada’s labour market. Firstly, this project elevated the importance of employee wellness in the workplace. As discussed, the COVID-19 pandemic dramatically changed aspects of our daily lives. From the adoption of remote work to staying indoors, our collective new normal was difficult to adapt to. That is why more organizations need to shift their focus toward employee wellness initiatives even after the pandemic. Wellness programs foster a positive work environment as when employees are healthy emotionally, physically, and mentally it significantly reduces employee absenteeism caused by sickness and burnout. In this sense, well-being is one of the most important factors that enable employees to be productive (McCoy et al., 2014). Secondly, this project revealed that employees no longer want to work in precarious jobs that are more stressful and lead to burnout. For instance, an employee who struggles to keep their kids engaged at home while they work virtually does not need to be reprimanded for their lack of focus. Instead, they should be supported by their employer and be given the proper resources to help with their issues. In the end, addressing employees' needs through compassionate communication will only improve their morale and motivate them to work better and be more involved as part of their organization (Wee & Fehr, 2021). Thirdly, this project highlighted the necessity for flexible work schedules. More specifically, the adoption of flexible practices post-pandemic will improve employees' living conditions as allowing employees to work at a time that is most convenient for them will strike a better balance between their personal and professional commitments (Coenen & Kok, 2014). Lastly, this research project revealed a need to build a more resilient workforce. For example, when the pandemic first struck, the sudden pressure placed on Canada’s labour market took a great toll on employees' well-being. Thus, it is essential to foster resilient employees through the use of training resources to make them prepared to face similar challenges and disruptions that may occur in the future.
In closing, the COVID-19 pandemic has fundamentally changed how employees work. It has shown organizations the importance of putting employees and their interests before anything. In this sense, it would be a mistake for the Canadian government to hope that things get back to ‘normal’ as they were before the pandemic. Doing so would ignore the opportunity for our labour market to evolve. Instead, as a whole, Canada needs to embrace the pandemic for what it truly is. It was not a great leveller, but instead, a wake-up call which needs to be picked up if we ever wish for Canadian workers to thrive in the post-pandemic world.
Appendices

Appendix A

Interview Questions

How have Ottawa workers' hours of work been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic?
1. Can you describe your work hours before the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. Can you describe your work hours during the COVID-19 pandemic?
3. Can you explain why your hours increased, decreased, or stayed the same during the COVID-19 pandemic?

How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected the overall finances of Ottawa workers?
4. Can you describe your general finances before the COVID-19 pandemic? In this description, please include your monthly pay in relation to your monthly expenses.
5. Can you describe your general finances during the COVID-19 pandemic? In this description, please include your monthly pay in relation to your monthly expenses.
6. Have you found that your finances either improved, worsened, or stayed the same, during the COVID-19 pandemic? Please explain why.

How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected the work benefits of Ottawa workers?
7. Can you describe the work benefits offered to you by your employer before the COVID-19 pandemic?
8. Can you describe the work benefits offered to you by your employer during the COVID-19 pandemic?
9. Did you feel supported by your employer during the pandemic? If yes or no, please explain why.

How has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the overall workload of Ottawa workers?
10. Can you describe a typical day's workload before the COVID-19 pandemic?
11. Can you describe a typical day's workload during the COVID-19 pandemic?
12. Did you feel overwhelmed by your work during the COVID-19 pandemic? If yes or no, please explain why.

How has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the work-life balance of Ottawa workers?
13. Can you describe your work-life balance before the pandemic?
14. Can you describe your work-life balance during the pandemic?
15. Have you found that your work-life balance either improved, worsened, or stayed the same, during the COVID-19 pandemic? Please explain why.
Recruitment Poster

Participate in a study on

[The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Ottawa Workers]

This project aims to Critically analyze the negative impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on Canadian workers.

To participate in this study, you must be:

- Working in Ottawa legally
- Able to speak English
- Able to have access to a computer and the internet
- At least 18 years old

This is a 60-minute study where you will be asked to join a Zoom meeting to answer questions about your experience working in Ottawa both before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study will be audio-recorded.

This study has been cleared by the Carleton University Research Ethics Board A Clearance # 118715

Please contact the researcher, Icarpson Joseph, for more details on this study at icarpsonjoseph@cmail.carleton.ca
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