

# MOTHERHOOD IN JOURNALISM: THE PERCEIVED IMPACT OF PRECARIZATION ON THE PARENTING STRATEGIES OF FEMALE JOURNALISTS

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**ABSTRACT** *Precarization has a significant impact on female journalists, who are often forced to balance their precarious working conditions and family commitments. However, little research has examined how female journalists cope with these challenges. This study employs qualitative semi-structured interviews with 14 Czech female journalists who are planning to start or expand their families and identifies five strategies: (1) making individual arrangements with superiors, which can sometimes lead to unfair working conditions; (2) changing jobs, including moves to less demanding positions or career changes; (3) using family support, particularly relying on family members for household help and childcare; (4) postponing motherhood or parenthood; and (5) paying higher insurance contributions if affordable. The study underscores the need for systemic changes to ensure more stable and fair working conditions for female journalists.*

## KEYWORDS

PRECARIZATION, FEMALE JOURNALISTS, PARENTING STRATEGIES, WORK-LIFE BALANCE, FALSE SELF-EMPLOYMENT

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## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, journalists globally have encountered increasing job insecurity and precarious working conditions (Araújo, 2025; Deuze, 2007; Matthews & Onyemaobi, 2020; Rick & Hanitzsch, 2023), thereby raising concerns regarding the future viability of the profession and its integral role within democratic societies (Gollmitzer, 2014). The phenomenon of precarization among journalists is related to the social transformations of recent decades and the penetration of new neoliberal market values into the public sector (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2006; Ivancheva et al., 2019; Piketty, 2014; Sowa, 2020). In exchange for low security and the transfer of significant risks to the individual, the ideal of self-fulfilment through meaningful creative work is often presented as the reward for cultural workers, artists (Mackenzie & McKinlay, 2021) and journalists (Deuze, 2013). Precarization among creative workers is considered one of the consequences of globalization (Fudge & Owens, 2006; Muehlberger, 2007; Standing, 2011; Walsh, 2019) and neoliberalism (Schram, 2015).

Previous research has primarily examined the precarization of journalists (Steiner, 2017; McKercher, 2009) or work-life reconciliation measures within the profession (Banks, 2007; Ross, 2001, 2017). However, parenting strategies amid precarity remain underexplored.

In this paper, we aim to explore how precarization affects the parenting strategies of female journalists. The Czech Republic, as a former Eastern Bloc country with a relatively low proportion of journalists employed under stable contracts, presents a critical case for such investigation. By centering our research on Czech female journalists, we address an additional gap, as existing studies on journalists and precarization predominantly concentrate on Western countries (e.g., Deuze, 2007; Ross, 2001). Central and Eastern Europe – with its unique history of state-sponsored women's emancipation projects, rapid transformation, and liberalization after 1989 – constitutes a critical socio-political context for our study.

Our objective is not to criticize freelance work per se, but rather to highlight the penetration of entrepreneurial models into formerly standard employment relations, as well as the frequently ambiguous boundaries between freelance work and precarious labour. Situations in which freelancers are compelled to accept low-paid or insecure positions, or operate within professions that offer minimal legal protection, effectively transform freelancing into a form of precarization.

Two streams of literature are relevant to this study, but they rarely intersect: first, studies on precarization in cultural industries (Alackovska, 2018; Banks, 2007; Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2013; Mackenzie & McKinlay, 2021; McRobbie, 2018; Standing, 2011) and in journalism (Deuze, 2013; Dwyer, 2019; Ross et al., 2013, 2017), and second, studies on the status of women in journalism that focus on the barriers they face, particularly in the area of reconciling work and family (Byerly, 2011, 2013; Chambers et al., 2004; De Vuyst & Raeymaeckers, 2019; Hodgins et al., 2007; North, 2014; Ross, 2001). Our study integrates these strands of research and extends them through empirical investigation.

## THE CONCEPT OF PRECARIZATION

The European Parliament (2017) recognizes precarious employment as employment that does not comply with EU, international, and national standards and laws and/or does not provide adequate social protection or sufficient remuneration for a decent life. There are, ipso facto, significant overlaps between precarization and freelancing; the distinction is often more axiological rather than empirical. In this study, we understand precarization as characterized by two key symptoms: (a) the embedding of entrepreneurial logic within employment relationships, and (b) the resulting socioeconomic vulnerability of workers.

The term *precarization* is understood as the replacement of an employment relationship with another type of relationship between worker and employer: most commonly, a combination of several part-time jobs, a one-off purchase of a service, or some forms of self-employment such as freelancing for one exclusive employer (Standing, 2011). This leads individuals to lack the social and financial security associated with a full employment (Ross, 2017).

According to Beck (2003), precarization means permanent uncertainty and change. In the creative professions, including journalism, the boundaries between professional and private life are blurred due to the unstable nature of work (Beck, 2003). This instability often prevents workers from planning their future lives (Butler, 2009; Standing, 2011) and can significantly impact decisions about the timing of marriage and childbearing as well as the number of children (Kalleberg, 2009).

In journalism, a key concern is the threat to journalists' independence (Deuze, 2013). Economic and job insecurity may compel journalists to conform to existing professional conditions or, alternatively, may foster reluctance or fear of altering their work methods, potentially undermining journalistic independence, quality, and objectivity (Goyanes & Rodríguez-Gómez, 2021; Waisbord, 2018). This stems from the fear that employers can easily terminate contracts, exacerbating this vulnerability (Rick, 2024).

Conversely, for some – mainly journalistic elites – freelancing, despite its lack of employee benefits, can serve as an attractive alternative, driven by the prospect of higher immediate income. Consciously choosing this work arrangement in exchange for this kind of freedom is a common justification for freelance work that nonetheless exhibits signs of precarization (Alacovska, 2018; Loacker, 2013; Mackenzie & McKinlay, 2021).

## GENDERED PROBLEMS OF JOURNALISM

Precarization is also a gendered problem (e.g., Ross, 2017; Carter et al., 2019). Thus, the following section offers a brief overview of the impact of precarization on female journalists.

The role of motherhood as a career hindrance in journalism has been demonstrated by more than forty years of research on the topic (North, 2014; Ogan et al., 1979; Ross, 2001). Research suggests that childcare responsibilities and a masculinized newsroom culture hinder career progression (North, 2014).

Many problems female journalists face are linked to balancing family and work life. In their profession, where there are often no fixed working hours and there is pressure to be constantly on the clock with recurrent last-minute changes in the organization of work, this severely limits their careers (De Vuyst & Raeymaeckers, 2019) or time that can be spent with family. Due to the highly unequal distribution of care and unpaid household work (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2021), women themselves are more likely to seek out jobs that exhibit characteristics of precarious work in the hope that it will allow them to better reconcile work and care better (Kalleberg, 2009).

Parenthood can be a pivotal barrier to caregivers' career advancement in several ways. Career interruption is necessary during childbearing, and caring for children can lead to reemployment challenges (Ko & Jang, 2022). To reconcile professional duties with motherhood, female journalists often resort to part-time or freelance work (De Vuyst & Raeymaeckers, 2019). Some studies (Miller, 2009; Taniguchi, 1999) report that when women choose to delay motherhood, especially the birth of their first child, it can result in significant earnings and career growth benefits. Female journalists are often penalized in the form of systematic underpayment of wages due to preemptive anticipation of reduced productivity, lost job experiences, career breaks, and employer discrimination (England et al., 2016; Kempton Davis & Walter, 2024; Livermore et al., 2011). Although no direct wage effects of motherhood were found in some countries, for example, in the USA, many European countries or Great Britain, a significant motherhood penalty – meaning economic disadvantages women face in workplace as a result of becoming mothers (Correll et al., 2007) – was observed (England et al., 2016; Halrynjo & Mangset, 2024; Kempton Davis & Walter, 2024; Livermore et al., 2011).

## THE CONTEXT: PRECARIETY, FREELANCING, AND GENDER IN CZECH JOURNALISM

This study focuses on the Czech Republic as a case study because of its specific former Eastern Bloc heritage and labour market transformations. In the following subsection, we describe the Czech journalistic environment, the “švarcsystém” – the country's most common type of precarization – and the regional sentiment towards unionization.

Precarious self-employment is present across Europe, including in the Czech Republic, where it is called *švarcsystém*. Named after its originator, Miroslav Švarc, in the 1990s, this practice involves employers circumventing formal employment by engaging workers under business-to-business contracts, thereby avoiding associated labour costs (Mervartová, 2013). Although illegal, in the Czech Republic, the dependent work is to be done in an employed status, it remains relatively widespread (Státní úřad inspekce práce, 2024). The

*švarcsystém* emerged as a symptom of early post-socialist transformation, exploiting legal ambiguities, and cost-cutting imperatives in transitioning to a market economy.

As Byerly (2011) notes, the number of male and female journalists tends to be balanced in former Eastern Bloc countries, where there was state-led women's emancipation through work prior to the transformation in 1989 and early 90s. According to the latest data, the number of male and female journalists in rank-and-file positions is almost equal in the Czech Republic at 55% to 45% (Publishers' Union, 2023). However, the relatively even representation of women in the newsrooms is disproportionate to their low representation in management (Volek & Urbániková, 2017).

Czech journalists have a small share of permanent contracts – 26% – while most of them would prefer an employment contract if they had a choice (Urbániková et al. 2024). Czech journalists often work in editorial offices as self-employed, essentially freelancing for a single employer: acting on behalf of the employer, following their instructions, using their tools and/or space, and receiving the same amount of money every month. Although this arrangement resembles a full-time job, it lacks a proper employment contract or any employment guarantees.

The predominant perceived issue among Czech journalists is the inadequate financial stability of the media sector, as indicated by 88% of the interviewed journalists, alongside correspondingly low remuneration (Urbániková et al. 2024). This financial precarity engenders additional challenges; notably, freelance journalists, due to their low income, often find themselves unable or unwilling to contribute to social security and health insurance beyond the minimum mandated levels.

In the Czech Republic, an additional pertinent issue pertains to the employer's obligation to provide employees with a designated workspace upon their return from maternity or parental leave, as well as to enable them to care for a family member, such as a sick child. These rights are exclusively guaranteed to employees under the provisions of the Czech Labour Code (Česká republika, 2006/2023). Conversely, individuals freelancing for a single employer generally rely on the goodwill of the employing entity, as such protections typically do not extend to them.

When it comes to collective bargaining, similarly to most countries in Central and Eastern Europe, the Czech Republic exhibits a negative attitude towards association and trade unionism. This is probably because unions were closely linked to state socialism (Curyło, 2022). Awareness of trade unions' functioning and the membership base is low. According to OECD data (2025), union density in the Czech Republic has been declining over the past decades, and as of 2023, approximately 9,4% of employees are union members, reflecting the country's persistently low levels of unionization compared with other OECD countries. This sentiment is reflected in the field of journalism, where the professional organization, the Czech Syndicate of Journalists, has maintained a steady membership of approximately 1,200 permanent members as of June 2025 (Syndikát novinářů České Republiky). For context, state wage statistics (Ministerstvo práce a sociálních věcí; 2025)

indicate that approximately 4,100 employees worked under employment contracts in the position of editors, journalists and related workers in the first half of 2025. This does not include self-employed persons and some atypical positions.

## DATA AND METHOD

To learn more about the parenting strategies of Czech precarized female journalists, we approached those directly affected by the problem – they are planning to start a family, have children, and have a precarious job – they work as freelancers. The study aims to answer the following research question: What work-related strategies do female journalists adopt to cope with parenthood in the context of precarization?

To answer this question, we adopted a qualitative research design and a semi-structured interview technique – one of the most common methods of data collection in qualitative research, suitable for gathering in-depth accounts of ‘personal experience’ (e.g. Braun & Clarke, 2016).

In semi-structured interviews, we explored how journalists perceived the influence of their precarious employment on their decision to become mothers. The interview guide consisted of three main parts, in which we asked about the following topics: work and care, reconciliation measures, perceived impacts of precarization in the current life situation and with a view to the future.

We interviewed 14 female journalists who were planning to start a family or have (another) child and occupied precarious professional positions as self-employed workers. We defined precarious work beforehand based on 1) the type of contract, which is not a regular employment contract, 2) the amount of remuneration they receive per month, which is not close to the minimum decent wage<sup>1</sup>, and 3) the fact that they themselves feel they occupied precarious professional positions as self-employed workers. The journalists qualified as research participants if all these criteria were met.

The journalists interviewed work as editors, reporters, and presenters across various media types (print, online, radio, and television) at leading news organizations. A purposive sampling technique was used to select the research participants. Out of 20 female journalists who were invited to participate, 14 agreed to be interviewed: three of them currently work in the press (daily newspapers, weekly, and monthly magazines), two in radio, four in television (both public and private), and five in online media. Most participants also have extensive work experience in other media types (10 out of 14). Most of them work in national media (11 out of 14). The other three work in regional media. As for socio-demographic characteristics, seven participants were under 30 years old, and seven were over 30 years old. Five of the 14 participants already have one or more children.

<sup>1</sup> The minimum decent wage in Prague, Czech Republic, was approximately 54,000 CZK (ca. 2180 EUR) in 2024 (dustojnamzda.cz, n.d.).

All of the interviews were conducted by the authors between March and May 2023 online via the Zoom platform, which allows audio-visual recording. The participants were informed in advance about the topic of the study, and the authors obtained journalists' informed consent. The interviews ranged from 30 to 90 minutes, with an average length of 45 minutes. The interviews were recorded, transcribed verbatim through the beey.io platform and analyzed afterwards.

Thematic analysis was used to identify, analyze, and report themes in the dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2016). Coding and data analysis were conducted in two steps to increase the validity and reliability of the findings. The authors coded the interviews independently and then merged the codes into a final model with five predominant parenting planning strategies. All data were anonymized within the transcripts; each participant was assigned a pseudonym to ensure anonymity. The audio-visual recording was deleted after transcribing.

## FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION

We identified five dominant strategies that female journalists employ for parenthood planning. These strategies, which are not mutually exclusive and are combined by participants, ranked by frequency of mention, include: (1) making individual arrangements with a superior, (2) transitioning from news reporting to feature writing or magazines with less frequency, (3) relying on family or partner support, (4) exiting the journalism profession, and (5) paying additional health insurance coverage.

### Making Individual Agreements with a Superior

The contracts that female journalists make with editorial offices often do not contain clear information, rights, and obligations. The vast majority of participants highlighted individual arrangements with superiors as a prominent strategy for addressing parenthood. According to the interviewed female journalists freelancing for a single employer, reconciliation measures, such as employer-supported institutional childcare or part-time job options, are largely absent within the Czech media landscape. Nevertheless, it is important to note that independent freelancers, as opposed to those contracted by a single employer, would not qualify for such benefits regardless. Consequently, participants rely heavily on their superiors' supportive attitude and goodwill. However, this practice is highly disadvantageous – it functions arbitrarily, and in situations where there are no universal rules to refer to, success depends on the willingness or unwillingness of one particular person or the journalist's own popularity within the team, which cannot be relied upon.

*I have a boss who tries to arrange the best conditions for me in a situation where systemic support is lacking in our company, but it is very dependent on the fact that I have support from her specifically. (Denisa, over 30, online daily media)*

However, the playing field is not equal for all. As individualism tends to be highly valued in a post-socialist work culture marked by signs of neoliberalism (Curyło, 2022), forms of collective bargaining to protect workers' rights carry somewhat negative connotations in Czech society due to their association with state socialism, which has led to widespread distrust. Individual arrangements lack systemic implementation and are therefore not enforceable.

*I asked if maybe I could schedule my shifts for every day but Friday so I could be with my kids. I was told that they can't do anything like that for me because it makes it hard for others to plan then. (Zuzana, over 30, radio)*

Some participants did not perceive the necessity for an individual agreement as negative; rather, they viewed it as advantageous in their precarious job compared to colleagues with regular contracts and clearly defined terms of cooperation. Consequently, they interpreted individual agreements regarding working hours or the scope of cooperation through the lens of freedom.

*I see it as a way of absolute flexibility, I don't have the whip hand of a contract where cooperation is precisely defined. (Lada, over 30, online magazine)*

Not only did some participants dismiss the idea that individual agreements with their superiors were problematic; rather, they viewed them as essential for retaining their job they felt grateful to perform. Some expressed the sentiment that such arrangements are simply a reality in the media industry – *it is just the way it is in the media* – they accept the need to make individual agreements with their superior as a natural aspect of their job and feel grateful for the opportunity to work in media, hence more readily accepting the unequal conditions between precarized positions and regular employment contracts.

### **From News Reporting to Feature Writing or to a Different Field of Work**

To escape irregular working hours, some participants indicated their intention to transition or were already transitioning from daily news reporting to feature writing, opinion pieces, or magazine journalism with less frequent deadlines – or even into different fields. This shift is driven by the desire to escape the daily pressure to perform and the unpredictability of working hours.

*I gave up the contract and purposely chose to work for a fortnightly magazine with my baby. It's not a daily newspaper job, so I can write when I want. (Petra, over 30, print magazine)*

Those who mentioned leaving daily news reporting to have more time saw this kind of work as *"totally incompatible with child care"* as Denisa (over 30, from online daily media) stated. Similar to the previous strategy of individual agreements with superiors, the majority in this case acted independently without negotiating their position. If participants perceived working in daily news reporting as incompatible with childcare, they themselves made arrangements such as changing roles or exiting the profession.

*With kids, it is necessary to do something with more regular working hours, so you can still work in the media, like weekly magazines or so. There's relative flexibility, you're more of a master of your time, but in the daily news job? Absolutely not. (Denisa, over 30, online daily media)*

However, according to some participants, this strategy required them to regress on the career ladder to positions they previously held, as they were offered to them by their superiors after returning from maternity/parental leave. Some participants noted that their ability to continue in daily news reporting was contingent on being able to select shifts compatible with their caregiving responsibilities, such as avoiding night or evening shifts. Here again, the previous strategy of making individual arrangements with superiors played a role.

*At one point, I really wanted to be a daily news reporter, but when I saw what it brings, and that it's done by women who don't have families, and those who have children end up in some position where they were ten years ago, before they worked their way up, because there is no other way to do it, I changed my mind. (Pavla, over 30, TV)*

In the context of precarization, some participants expressed a determination to exit the field, citing not only the challenge of balancing work and caregiving responsibilities but also the uncertainty surrounding future career prospects. For instance, some participants mentioned their intention to depart from the news media industry altogether due to the limitations imposed by precarious jobs, such as the inability to secure a retirement pension at a sufficient rate based on their low income.

### **Relying on Family or Partner Support**

It was important for the interviewed journalists to be able to rely on their family members in order to practice their profession. A significant portion reported relying on their family background and/or partners who hold better or at least more stable employment positions than they do. Some participants mentioned that their ability to dedicate themselves fully to their jobs and raise children without additional concerns was made possible by their partners, who manage household responsibilities and childcare.

*If it weren't for my husband, I definitely wouldn't be able to do this job, because actually I do almost nothing at home. He does everything. (Zuzana, over 30, radio)*

Previous studies (e.g., Ross, 2001) observed similar strategies among female journalists with regular employment contracts. However, for those in precarious jobs, such strategies also encompass financial support from their partners in addition to assistance with childcare while managing demanding jobs. This highlights both the poor financial conditions in the Czech media and the overall gender pay gap, with women in the Czech Republic earning on average up to 20% less than men. Female journalists often expressed gratitude for partners with stable work positions due to their own employment precarity.

*My partner has very good working conditions in terms of security, he is in a huge union and his working conditions are really incomparable to mine. If I stay working, he'll go on parental leave or we will use his high salary to make up for the dropped income because I won't have paid maternity leave. Sometimes we joke about him subsidizing my job even now. (Kamila, under 30, daily newspaper)*

Significant differences were observed between participants who willingly accepted precarious jobs and those who had no choice due to superior refusal or lack of options for regular employment contracts. Among those participants who work as freelancers voluntarily, there was a prevailing sense of ease, even regarding reliance on others in various aspects, because in their case it was a free choice. Conversely, involuntary freelancers can be categorized into two groups: (1) those who resignedly accept the situation as an inherent aspect of the media industry, believing nothing can be done to change it, and (2) those expressing anger towards the system, and shame for their perceived inability to rely on themselves given their age, experience, or background, particularly within “prestigious media outlets” such as Czech public service TV or radio.

*It's just a terrible shame – I feel ashamed, but the radio should feel ashamed, too. But I feel embarrassed that I'm going along with this at all. (Viktorie, over 30, radio)*

### Exiting the Journalism Profession

Some female journalists interviewed who desire children in the future do not see it as a need to stay in the profession and it is not a major problem for them, as they do not necessarily see “journalism as a mission” anymore. Those participants who do not yet have children or are now working “*over the limit*”, which means staying in the profession longer than they intended to, as *Lada (over 30, online magazine)* said, are considering leaving the demanding profession of journalism in some time to have children or more spare time.

*I don't think I can do it like that anymore, when I'm 45, I don't think I'll have that much energy anymore. I think there's a period now when I do quite a lot, even with a little kid, but the horizon is so scary for me that I know I can't do it long-term and I have to do something else. (Lada, over 30, online magazine)*

Not only is it important for them to have a child, but the participants perceive this fact as a more important opportunity for self-fulfilment, as “[work] won't love them back, but other people will” (Jaffe, 2021, p. 274). It is noteworthy that the participants perceive this as an either/or choice: they would either leave the profession and have children, or stay in journalism and do not have any. When we asked about the welfare state principle – that one should not have to choose between work and family (Béland et al., 2021) – some participants disagreed.

*It's a job, not a life, so I just try to do the job as best as I can but if I want to have a family, I just don't stay there, so I plan. (Nada, under 30, online magazine)*

Few participants only contemplate starting a family when they secure a more stable job, whether within the media with a regular employment contract or in another sector. Conversely, those precarized for an extended period or actively planning for parenthood in the near future tend to express frustration with their situation. Younger female journalists often mention postponing motherhood until it is now or never, citing concerns about age and health as factors influencing their decision.

*For now, it's so much more convenient for me to have a precarious job. When I really really plan a family, I'll think about it, but now that I'm young, I kind of don't care. (Lenka, under 30, TV)*

Female journalists over the age of thirty often saw this as additional anxiety. With a regular employment contract, they would have less anxiety regarding the planning, timing, or potential temporary nature of their job.

### **Paying Extra to Get the Regular Entitlements and Returning to Work as Soon as Possible**

Some participants acknowledged the “tragic” nature of their situation. As involuntary freelancers lack proper employment contracts, they often cannot afford coverage for sickness, maternity, or parental leave. As a result, some of them decided to pay extra for health insurance and, in particular, for voluntary sickness insurance. This is important because eligibility for maternity benefits is not linked to general health insurance, but to sickness insurance contributions. By voluntarily paying into the sickness insurance scheme, they secured entitlement to maternity benefits, which would not be available to them otherwise.

*I learned this from a colleague who also didn't have a contract when she was going on maternity leave, and she told us not to forget to pay if we wanted to have kids and receive maternity benefits. (Michaela, under 30, TV)*

In the context of health insurance, participants also mentioned the fact that they were afraid of themselves or their child getting sick because they would either have to go to work sick because they were not entitled to paid sick leave, and some would even have their income cut. For the minority of those with a family or partner support, this inconvenience was not such a big problem. However, for others, even a short-term income loss was unaffordable.

*When the kid or I am sick, I must go to work. That's logical, otherwise, there's no money. Just thinking about it is horrifying. (Simona, over 30, online daily media)*

Nevertheless, all participants generally accepted this as something they could not do much about as they viewed it as a reality of working in the media.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This study aimed to address the research question: What work-related strategies do female journalists adopt to cope with parenthood in the context of precarization? The findings reveal that participants navigate these challenges through various individual strategies, including making individual arrangements with a superior, transitioning from news reporting to feature writing or magazines with less frequent deadlines, relying on family or partner support, exiting the journalism profession, and paying additional health insurance coverage.

A key finding is that in the absence of systemic support measures – such as reconciliation and work-life balance measures offered by employers –, the playing field remains inherently unequal. For instance, in cases where women manage to negotiate individual arrangements with superiors, the outcomes are often influenced by subjective factors such as personal popularity. Those who are perceived as less “favoured” find themselves at a disadvantage. Despite this inequity, most participants appear to accept their situation as an aspect of working in the media industry. A prevailing sense of isolation was noted among participants, many of whom lacked awareness that collective action could be a viable means to secure more equitable working conditions.

This sense of resignation stands in contrast to recent Jenny Wiik and Margareta Melin’s findings from Sweden, a country with strong traditions of collective bargaining (with up to 70% of journalists in unions), strong labour rights, and high professional prestige in journalism (Melin & Wiik, 2024). Unlike their Swedish counterparts, Czech female journalists in this study do not feel entitled to assert their labour rights with the same confidence. This disparity reflects broader regional trends in Central and Eastern Europe, where skepticism towards trade unions is common and where there is a deeply rooted belief that collective bodies lack influence (Trif et al., 2023). One explanation for this difference lies in cultural context. In Czech society, trade unions and collective labour solutions still carry negative connotations, largely due to their historical association with the former socialist regime. In the current post-socialist, neoliberal labour environment (Curyło, 2022), entrepreneurial values and individualism are more socially valued than solidarity or collective advocacy. Such perceptions are understandable, particularly given the historical context and the relatively recent legal inclusion of freelancers in union structures within the EU (Rainone, 2022).

More broadly, international research over the past two decades (e.g., Cohen, 2015; Deuze, 2005; Neilson, 2008; Örnebring, 2018) has documented similar sentiments regarding the experience of precarity in journalism. An important avenue for future research could involve deepening the knowledge and understanding of individuals who have left the profession due to the chronic instability and difficulty of maintaining clear boundaries between personal and professional life.

Our sample reported seriously considering job changes – either moving to less demanding roles within journalism or switching careers entirely. With relatively low

salaries, participants found it unsustainable to remain in precarious jobs. Financial insecurity makes it difficult to contribute sufficiently to social insurance systems, save for maternity or parental leave, or plan for retirement. While some participants perceived this as inherently unjust, most accepted it as the industry norm – an observation consistent with previous studies on precarious work among female journalists (e.g., Briscoe, 2021; Melin & Wiik, 2024; Springer & Rick, 2025).

The journalists interviewed viewed their precarious status as inevitable within the media industry. A smaller subgroup expressed satisfaction with their current conditions, while only a minority recognized the structural nature of the problem and considered it potentially solvable through collective action. Unlike earlier research that emphasized alienation, insecurity, and resistance to such working conditions (e.g., Deuze, 2013; Mackenzie & McKinlay, 2021), our findings suggest a different picture: a notable portion of participants either accepted or were content with their circumstances. These participants constantly repeated that the supposed freedom that freelance work allows them was important to them, or they were journalists who relied on support from family or partners.

Throughout our interviews, a recurring narrative emerged that could not be overlooked. Many female journalists expressed a deep sense of gratitude simply for the opportunity to work in journalism, even in the absence of formal contracts, social security, or stable income. They repeatedly described freelancing as a personal choice or even an advantage, framing their precarious status as a form of professional freedom – they often responded with what we term “gratitude labour<sup>2</sup>”. However, this perceived autonomy frequently concealed a more troubling reality: a structural insecurity that compelled them to accept unstable conditions out of fear that no other opportunities would be available. In an increasingly saturated and competitive media landscape, journalistic work is experienced as a scarce resource – one for which they are expected to feel thankful, regardless of the cost. The interviewed journalists demonstrated a strong willingness to accept difficult conditions out of gratitude for being able to do meaningful work in their chosen field.

This study has several limitations. The sample consisted of a relatively small number of participants (N = 14), all of whom were women working in the Czech Republic. Including the perspectives of male journalists in similarly precarious roles would broaden the understanding of how gender and homo/heterosociality (Hammarén, 2014) interact with labour insecurity in journalism. Furthermore, a nationwide quantitative study could provide a clearer picture of the actual prevalence of precarious employment in Czech journalism. A comparable study has already been conducted in Germany (Rick, 2023), and a similar effort in the Czech context would be highly valuable.

<sup>2</sup> The passion economy (Davidson, 2021; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2024) frames precarious work as doing what journalists love for income, whereas *gratitude labour* frames it, in our conception, as showing thankfulness for insecure opportunities rather than demanding better working conditions.

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# MAJČINSTVO U NOVINARSTVU: PERCIPIRANI UTJECAJ PREKARIZACIJE NA STRATEGIJE RODITELJSTVA NOVINARKI

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**SAŽETAK** Prekarizacija ima značajan utjecaj na novinarkе, koje su prisiljene pronaći ravnotežu između nesigurnih uvjeta rada i obiteljskih obveza. Ipak, malo istraživanja ispituje kako se novinarkе nose s tim izazovima. U ovom istraživanju, kvalitativni polustrukturirani intervjui s 14 čeških novinarki koje planiraju zasnovati ili proširiti obitelj otkrili su pet strategija: (1) sklapanje individualnih dogovora s nadređenima, što u nekim slučajevima može dovesti do nepravednih uvjeta rada; (2) promjena posla, što uključuje prelazak na manje zahtjevna radna mjesta ili potpunu promjenu karijere; (3) korištenje podrške obitelji, što često znači oslanjanje na članove obitelji za pomoć u kućanstvu i brigu o djeci; (4) odgađanje majčinstva ili roditeljstva; i (5) plaćanje većih mjesečnih naknada ako si to mogu priuštiti. Studija ukazuje na potrebu sustavnih promjena kako bi se osigurale stabilnije i pravednije radne uvjete za novinarkе.

## KLJUČNE RIJEČI

PREKARIZACIJA, NOVINARKE, NOVINARSTVO, RODITELJSKE STRATEGIJE,  
RAVNOTEŽA IZMEĐU POSLA I PRIVATNOG ŽIVOTA, LAŽNO SAMOZAPOŠLJAVANJE

*Bilješka o autoricama*

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