

# **PRECARIOUS LABOUR IN SINGAPORE'S FILM, TELEVISION AND VIDEO INDUSTRY - THE LIMITATIONS OF POLICY AND POTENTIAL FOR COLLECTIVE ACTION**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Since the 1990s, the Singapore government has actively planned the development of its cultural and creative economy with the purpose of turning the city-state into a global arts city. By the mid-2010s, the government had begun to recognise the rise of the gig economy and correspondingly, the precarity affecting gig workers including freelancers in the creative industries. Existing data suggests that like media professionals elsewhere in the world, those in Singapore face paradoxical circumstances where the pursuit of freedom and autonomy leads to a constant state of precarity - creative workers accept the prospect of poor working conditions in exchange for a job that could offer the possibility of greater self-expression and meaning (Shukaitis and Figiel, 2020; Ross, 2008; McGuigan, 2010; McRobbie, 2002; Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011). The Singapore media freelancer's circumstances are also influenced by the city-state's approach to governance and regulation of the sector and strict laws on unions that limit collective action. This research study sought to verify the nature of precarity among freelancers in Singapore's film, television and video industry, identify underlying reasons for the persistence of poor working conditions, and investigate whether policymakers and industry representatives could mitigate the situation. A mixed-methods approach, including a survey, focus group and interviews, was used to gather data from freelance media workers and industry associations (including employers of freelance labour). The research found that budget limitations and the lack of standardisation and accreditation in the industry were key factors influencing the persistence of precarity, and no one was taking responsibility for resolving these problems. With the governing statutory body Infocomm Media Development Authority recently moving to a greater focus on the digital and infocommunications sector, appropriate policy measures to mitigate labour precarity may remain distant.

Freelancers; creative workers; unions; labour precarity; media work

## **Introduction**

In 2002, the Singapore government's Economic Review Committee put forth the Creative Industries Development Strategy, emphasising the economic dimension of creativity and culture. This marked the introduction of the 'creative industries' discourse into Singapore policies, in which the creative industries "comprise three major sectors – arts and culture, media and design" (Kong, 2012).

Subsequently, the Media Development Authority (MDA) was officially established in 2003 under the Ministry of Communications and Information to "develop a vibrant media industry in Singapore" (Media Development Authority 2002). Roadmaps such as Media 21 (2003) and the Singapore Media Fusion Plan (2009) were created to advance the media sector, and to position Singapore as a "Global Media City". This was to be achieved through strategies such as nurturing the growth of media talent, creating a conducive environment for media financing to flourish, and building a media cluster (Infocomm Media Development Authority, 2003; Media Development Authority, 2009).

However, when the Infocomm Media Masterplan 2025 was released in 2015, there was a shift in emphasis to the digital info-communications ecosystem, with the traditional "media industries", such as film, television and broadcasting, apparently side-lined. The Masterplan 2025 featured keywords such as "data", "technologies", "ecosystem" and "connecting people" (Ministry of Communications

and Information, 2015). In 2016, MDA and the Infocomm Development Authority (IDA) were merged to form the Infocomm Media Development Authority (IMDA), with a mission to “drive Singapore’s digital transformation with infocomm media”.

This paper will focus on the working conditions for workers in Singapore’s film, television and video industry. Globally, there have been rising numbers of freelance or self-employed workers, but freelancers are traditionally prevalent in the media sector (Cohen, 2019). The nature of creative work, and the rapid growth of the creative industries has made creative freelancers susceptible to what is known as labour precarity, or “existence without security” (Murray and Gollmitzer, 2012). There are “‘atypical’ working conditions across the media, information and communication sectors of the economy, where people increasingly work without contracts, without formalized relationships with clients or employers, and at times even without any kind of official salary or pay” (Elefante and Deuze, 2012). Multiple studies highlight the issues that these workers face, such as low wages, long working hours, the stress and anxiety of looking for work, and exploitation by larger corporations (Lingo and Tepper, 2013; de Peuter and Cohen, 2020; Brook, O’Brien, and Taylor, 2020). Due to the unpredictable nature and demands of such project work, they also experience job insecurity, unstable income streams, which is sometimes compounded by late or non-payments by clients, as well as poor or non-existent health benefits (Kong, 2011; Coles, 2016; Curtin, 2016)

The Singapore government started to recognise the growth of the gig economy by the mid-2010s, and the Ministry of Manpower (MOM) started collecting statistics on freelancers, or own account workers, in 2016 (Ministry of Manpower, 2023). According to the International Labour Organisation, the term ‘own account worker’ refers to “workers who, working on their own account or with one or more partners, hold the type of job defined as a 'self-employment job' and have not engaged on a continuous basis any 'employees' to work for them during the reference period” (UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 1993). While the “own account worker” can refer to a broad group of people who are self-employed, or who run their own small business or sole proprietorship, the “freelancer” is a subset of this larger group. However, in this paper, the word “freelancer” will be used to refer to the “own account worker” as well.

With no protection under Singapore’s labour laws, and little to no representation by the trade unions, media freelancers face tremendous precarity in their working lives. The Employment Act, which is the “main labour law” of Singapore, covers workers who are under a “contract of service with an employer” (Ministry of Manpower). This excludes own account workers, who are typically under a “contract for service”. Freelancers in Singapore are not represented by the labour movement, as they are not covered under the Industrial Relations Act nor the Trade Unions Act. Historically, trade unions in Singapore are perceived to have less power. Singapore operates under a ‘tripartite partnership’ model, with “the government, employers and trade unions working together, to, essentially, increase efficiency and flexibility in the capital market” (Rajah, 2019). This seems to weaken the independence of the trade unions. Also, the only trade union centre in Singapore, the National Trades Union Congress (NTUC) which was established in 1961, has very close ties with the ruling party in government. This further brings into question NTUC’s ability to mount an “active, independent challenge” to protect the interests of the workers against the government’s need for economic efficiency (Rajah, 2019).

As part of the ‘tripartite partnership’ model, the Tripartite Alliance for Fair and Progressive Employment Practices (TAFEP) was established in 2006, and creates guidelines and standards to “protect atypical workers who fall outside the sphere of Employment Act protection” (Rajah, 2019). The Tripartite Standard on Procurement of Services from Media Freelancers (TS Media Freelancers), launched in 2017, includes these four practices: have a written contract; pay on time; prioritise negotiation and mediation during disputes; and, provide insurance. Production companies are encouraged to adopt the TS Media Freelancers, in order to obtain grants from IMDA for creating Public Service Broadcast content (Tripartite Alliance for Fair & Progressive Employment Practices, n.d.). Although they encourage all employers to adhere to these standard employment practices, it is entirely discretionary, and employers have “no legal obligation to embrace these heightened standards” (Rajah, 2019).

Academic research regarding the plight of Singapore's freelancers within the film, television and video industry has been scarce. Most of the research on the Singapore film, television and video industry has focused on areas such as 'creative industries' policy, censorship issues, colonial influence, and the Singapore identity (Sim, 2011; Chan, 2011; Gwee, 2009; Fong, 2018; Lim, Bali, and Moo, 2019; Yue, 2018). This paper tries to fill this gap through research on the current working conditions that freelancers in Singapore's film, television and video industry face. The research will investigate the possible underlying reasons for the current status quo, and explore whether government policies will be able to mitigate this labour precarity, or whether policy had, in fact, contributed to the existing set of conditions. The prevailing state of labour protection and potential for collective action among media freelancers in Singapore will also be examined. Through this process, this research hopes to provide deeper understanding into the precarity faced by media freelancers in Singapore, and build a foundation for further research into this area.

This paper is organised into five sections. After the introduction, the review section provides a academic background to understanding the precarity of creative labour and how labour law, as well as collective action, could mitigate this precarity. The following section describes the research approach and methodology. Thereafter, the discussion section highlights key findings from the research. Finally, the conclusion will summarise the paper, and provide suggestions for further research.

## **Review**

The paradox of being an own account worker, or freelancer, is that the pursuit of freedom and autonomy can lead to workers being in a constant state of precarity. Creative workers often accept job insecurity, in exchange for being able to choose their own projects and working hours. This can potentially be exploited by clients and companies, in the form of 'flexploitation', which is "a mode of domination ... based on the creation of a generalised and permanent state of insecurity aimed at forcing workers into submission, into the acceptance of exploitation" (Morgan, Wood, and Nelligan, 2013). The mantra of "Do What You Love" permeates the creative work culture, and many creative workers accept the prospect of poor working conditions in exchange for a job that could offer the possibility of greater self-expression and meaning (Shukaitis and Figiel, 2020; Ross, 2008; McGuigan, 2010). The belief that "wages shouldn't be the primary motivation" further reinforces exploitation and demeans the value of labour (Tokumitsu, 2014).

In the film, television and video industry, the organisational characteristics of media production lends itself to the transient employment nature of most creative labour within this industry. Teams come together to work on a media project, and go their separate ways after each project (Davies and Sigthorsson, 2013). In Menger's article, "Artistic labor markets and careers", he explores the prevalence of casual labour in the production of the arts and states that this could be due to several reasons, such as the need for workers with different skills for each unique project. Companies have no incentive to employ full-time media workers, given the project-based nature of productions, and they can lower their business costs by taking "no responsibility for training, overhead or benefits, ... [transferring] the risk and insecurity of production onto individual workers" (Cohen, 2019). Menger's article also highlights 'uncertainty' as "a built-in characteristic of the creative process" (Menger, 1999). Uncertainty can create unpredictability, which is desirable in creative work, but this is a double-edged sword that also contributes to the precarious nature of creative work.

Labour law is key in addressing the inequality that is present in the employment relationship, to "counteract the inherent inequality of bargaining power in such connections, [and] to redistribute the resources and power between employer and employee" (Rajah, 2019). However, within labour policies, freelancers are usually treated as independent contractors, with business risks and costs borne by the individual freelancers. They often "do not legally have access to unions that could collectively bargain on their behalf ... or to protections under labour law, nor can they access social benefits" (Cohen, 2019). Nevertheless, there have been efforts made by some governments to recognise and mitigate the precarity of creative workers. For instance, Germany's Artists Social Fund "offers statutory social insurance for

self-employed creative workers”, while Austria, Estonia, Finland, and France have similar measures (Murray and Gollmitzer, 2012).

Trade unions and associations are usually formed to protect the interests of workers, because in cases where there are “structurally unequal labour-capital relations, organising collectively is essential to give workers bargaining power and, in turn, assert, protect and advance their economic and occupational interests” (de Peuter and Cohen, 2020). However, the role of traditional trade unions is limited, because the freelancer is not considered an employee. Creative workers have reduced access to collective bargaining options, and depend on their individual power or influence to negotiate their rates and terms of engagement (Stahl, 2009). For workers without such individual power, it is potentially a race to the bottom, both in terms of rates and the standard of working conditions.

With the absence of a formal labour policy framework, and the inability of traditional trade unions to address their needs, creative freelancers have had to “find creative and experimental ways to address work-related challenges outside official legal regimes”, such as “visibility projects, organized campaigns, and collective organizations” (Cohen, 2019). Creative workers are known to value their sense of independence, freedom and autonomy. Yet, if creative workers choose to eschew some degree of individual independence, and exert collective autonomy instead, they could potentially overcome their differences. For example, in 2023, the Writers Guild of America (WGA) initiated a strike that lasted for 146 days, and resulted in a new contract for its members that ensured proper compensation for writers, terms for streaming programmes, and the utilisation of artificial intelligence (Anguiano, 2023). Collective action can be seen as a way for creative workers to reclaim their professional autonomy, which is their ability to “collectively exert control over the terms under which their labour power is engaged ... [and] to seek ways to sustain independent work” (de Peuter and Cohen, 2020). Rather than being seen as a restriction of their individual autonomy, these workers may collectively be able to expand more control over their conditions of employment, and their professional careers.

## **Research Methodology**

Previous studies into the experiences of creative workers conducted by Genders, Kong, as well as Hesmondhalgh and Baker, have used semi-structured interviews to elicit more qualitative data. Hence, a mixed methods approach was used for this research.

Firstly, an online survey was conducted in late 2023 and covered topics such as respondents’ current working conditions in the workplace, and their views on what changes they would like to see in Singapore’s film, television and video industry. There were a total of ninety-five valid responses. The respondents are a non-representative sample of the total number of own account workers (OAWs) working in Singapore’s film, television and video industry, as the survey was circulated through the researcher’s personal networks and industry groups. Nonetheless, as the snowball method was used, there is a certain degree of distance between the researcher and respondents.

Following this, a focus group as well as interviews with OAWs were conducted. Six participants were selected from the survey respondents to form a focus group. Based on the survey demographics, efforts were made to ensure a representative sample. However, the profile of the participants depended largely on their availability and willingness to participate. An additional five OAWs were interviewed individually. The profiles of the 11 OAWs are shown in table 1.

Table 1  
Profile of Own Account Workers in the focus group and interviews

OAW	Gender	Age Range (years)	Years of Experience in the industry	Job Role(s)
1	Female	25 – 34	5 – 10 years	Film/TV Producer Executive Producer Project Manager of Media IP
2	Male	45 – 54	20 years or more	Writer, Film/TV Producer Executive Producer, Director
3	Male	35 – 44	Less than 1 year	Actor
4	Male	25 – 34	5 – 10 years	Actor
5	Male	25 – 34	3 – 5 years	Actor
6	Male	35 – 44	15 – 20 years	Production Crew Audio/Sound Designer
7	Male	45 – 54	15 – 20 years	Actor
8	Male	25 – 34	10 – 15 years	Writer, Production Crew Director
9	Female	18 – 24	1 – 3 years	Production Crew
10	Female	35 – 44	20 years or more	Film/TV Producer Executive Producer Project Manager of Media IP
11	Male	45 – 54	10 – 15 years	Writer, Film/TV Producer Executive Producer, Director

Finally, as previous academic research into this subject area in Singapore is sparse, interviews with industry experts were also conducted to supplement existing knowledge, and to understand the industry better from a macro-level perspective. The four industry experts belong to key associations or organisations which have an impact on the industry, namely:

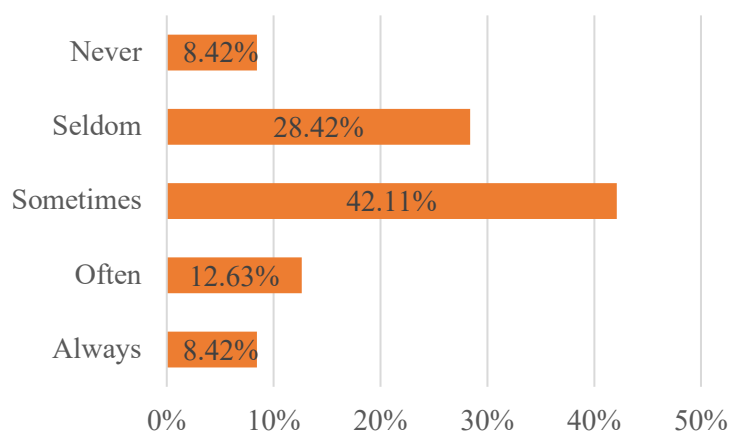
- National Trades Union Congress, Freelancers and Self-Employed Unit (NTUC U FSE)
- Singapore Association of Motion Picture Professionals (SAMPP)
- SG Creative & Cultural Community (Facebook group)
- Association of Independent Producers (AIPRO)

As noted in the literature on precarity in the creative industries, accurate data collection is a challenge that policy-makers face when dealing with the freelance worker population, because freelancers’ “unconventional and irregular work pattern of moving from one project to the next, as well as avoidance of traditional corporate structures, makes it difficult to track them and gather statistics on their economic size and contribution” (Kong, 2011). Hence, it is difficult to obtain a representative population of all job roles. The research is also dependent on those who self-identify as freelancers, and this can be tricky because many of these workers may hold multiple jobs, and work full-time or part-time in other industries as well. In addition, the short timeframe to complete this paper has limited the extent of research that can be conducted. However, despite these limitations, this research hopes to provide the first step into understanding the working conditions of freelancers in Singapore’s film, television and video industry, and the nature of their precarity.

## Discussion

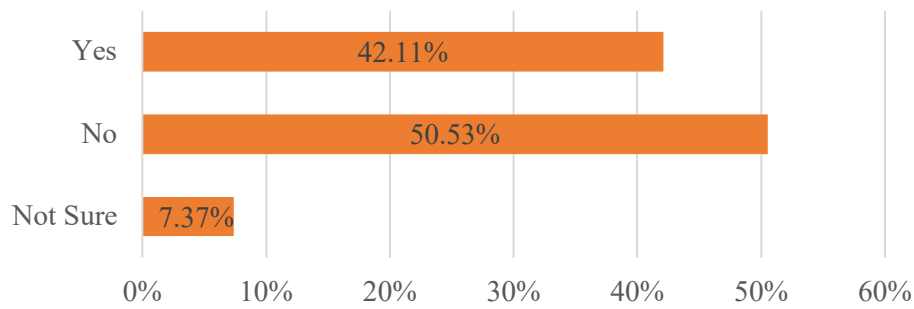
The survey findings indicated that media freelancers in Singapore face similar labour precarity as other workers in creative industries do. During the period of January 2021 to August 2023, 58.95% (56 respondents) experienced late payments beyond the agreed payment terms. Late payments seemed more prevalent for certain job roles, with 85.19% (23 respondents) of production crew experiencing late payments during this period. During the same period, 26.32% (25 respondents) indicated that they have experienced non-payments, essentially not being paid for work that they had done. The industry experts recognised that freelancers were loath to file claims through official channels, such as the Small Claims Tribunal, probably due to the perceived time and effort that would need to be invested into getting the money back. Freelancers also generally fear burning bridges, which may lead to a loss of returning clients, and hence a loss of potential income. As a result, they may be more tolerant of bad practices, viewing it as par for the industry.

Contracts for service are not standardised throughout the Singapore film, television and video industry, and this compounds the risks that freelancers face when taking on new projects. The provision of contracts is largely dependent on the type of project. For longer term projects like narrative dramas, and for projects involving large corporations, there is perceived to be a stronger need to protect both parties, and hence, contracts are more likely to be handed out to the OAWs.

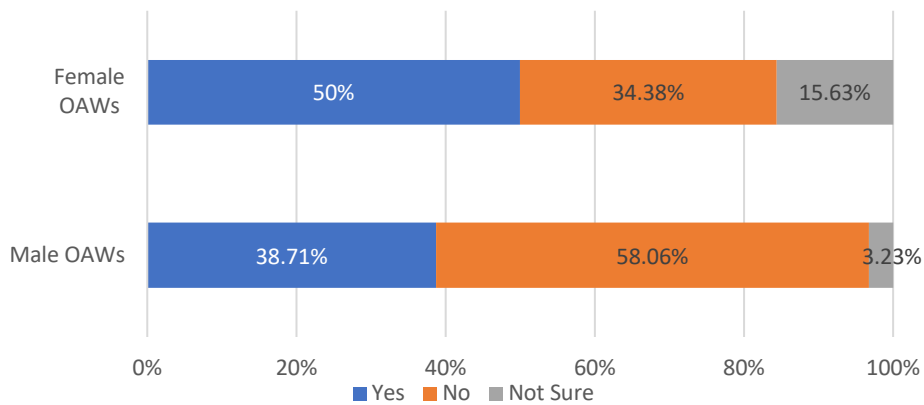


**Figure 1.** Survey – Frequency of receiving a Contract for Service.

Workplace health and safety encompasses the physical, mental, emotional and psychological health of workers at the workplace. 42.11% (40 respondents) indicated that they had felt unsafe at work before. In particular, female OAWs were more likely to have felt unsafe at work before. Only 34.38% of the female OAWs definitively answered “No”, that they had not felt unsafe at work before, compared to 58.06% of the male OAWs.



**Figure 2.** Survey – OAWs on whether they had felt unsafe at work before.



**Figure 3.** Survey – Comparison between Male and Female OAWs feeling unsafe at work.

There was consensus that a general lack of awareness for health and safety at work contributes to near inhumane conditions that take a toll on the human body, and indicates a lack of respect for labour. This lack of awareness manifests in long working hours, sometimes stretching up to 18 or 24 hours on set, going for extended work hours without meals, and even allowing workers to drive after long hours of work. The fear of speaking up can increase the risks that OAWs face when they encounter incidents that may endanger their own health and safety.

The OAWs and the industry experts highlighted certain factors that may have contributed to the labour precarity of media workers in Singapore – limited budgets, and the lack of standardisation within the industry. In this context, there are two separate definitions of “standards”. Firstly, it refers to the level of capability of workers within the industry. Secondly, it refers to established practices within the production process.

Budgets can have wide-ranging effects on working conditions, whether workplace safety, production timelines, or payment issues. A large proportion of the media work in Singapore is commissioned by MediaCorp, the main public broadcaster, or by government agencies, who are the biggest buyer of media services. When the budgets for media work are limited and insufficient for the work that is being done, especially in an expensive city like Singapore, productions are pressed for time and this could cause safety issues to crop up. The tight budget may create cashflow issues, which could trickle down to the late payment and non-payment of freelancers. Production companies may even overlook, or intentionally leave out, safety elements such as the purchase of production insurance or the hiring of a stunt coordinator, to cut down on costs. This might be avoided if proper budgeting decisions were made, taking the welfare of workers into consideration. Clients and companies, or procurement divisions, need to be aware of the consequences of disbursing insufficient budgets, and the toll it takes on the health and safety of workers in this industry.

The capability of the workers, and the producers or the managers, was also suggested to have contributed to the deterioration of working conditions within the industry. If workers lack proper training, or are not qualified to do the work they were assigned to, this can affect many factors, from the quality of work produced, to the management of budgets, and the maintaining of safety standards at work.

Finally, the lack of standard production practices leads to inconsistent working conditions between projects and companies. The OAWs work with a range of companies in Singapore's media landscape, from MediaCorp to smaller-sized companies, and may receive different contracts and payment terms, and encounter different safety standards. Standardisation of these production practices will help to alleviate some of the precarity that these media workers face. There is also a lack of standard production payment practices that leads to differential treatment between different departments, and inequitable allocation of the limited budget. This causes fragmentation and resentment between different departments, and the perceived unfairness would also make it harder for workers to band together and collectively work to make the industry better.

As Singapore's media regulator, the IMDA is a key player in this sector. The OAWs and industry experts generally felt that IMDA could do better in supporting the media industry and the workers within this industry. In IMDA's Annual Report 2022/2023, a large proportion of the report was dedicated to technical innovation, and the building of digital infrastructure and a digital society. Only one single section covered the media industry, mentioning noteworthy films and events where Singapore-produced work was shown, as well as reiterating their mission to create "a cohesive and digitally inclusive society where every Singaporean can embrace digital for life, bridging generations and cultures through the power of media and technology" (Infocomm Media Development Authority, 2023). The IMDA generally adopts a laissez-faire policy towards the management of media, with the exception of a few key areas, like public broadcast content standards and censorship. There is little focus placed on the workers within the media industry, and IMDA relies on the industry to take care of its workers, and regulate itself. However, the question is whether industry self-regulation is sufficient to mitigate the current labour precarity that workers face. Perhaps by recognising the existence of the media sector as an industry, acknowledging the 'soft power' reach of the media sector, and identifying a larger international audience beyond the shores of Singapore, IMDA could help to alleviate the precarity of media freelancers in Singapore.

As mentioned in the introduction, the TS Media Freelancers covers several areas that are essential to working conditions, such as written agreements, insurance and payment terms. However, there was a general consensus from both the OAWs and industry experts that the implementation of these guidelines seemed to be lacking. While the main commissioning bodies, such as MediaCorp, require production companies to sign the TS Media Freelancers in order to access grants and funding for their commissioned projects, there seems to be little to no enforcement of the companies actually putting these Standards into practice. Furthermore, even the OAWs, who are one of the stakeholders of the TS Media Freelancers, are also largely unaware of these Standards. Among the 11 OAWs in the focus group and interviews, only five stated that they were aware of the TS Media Freelancers, and three of these five are producers. This raises questions about the effectiveness of these guidelines. Kong has argued that Singapore is a "hyperplanned economy" (Kong, 2011) and state intervention is evident in many areas of life in Singapore. Yet, when it comes to film and media policy, and the protection of atypical workers, the Singapore government does not want to over-regulate, and prefers to allow the private sector to regulate themselves. The TS Media Freelancers is intended as a set of guidelines, but there should also be incentives, and disincentives or penalties, introduced to encourage implementation of these standard practices.

In 2015, the NTUC set up the Freelancers and Self-Employed Unit (U FSE) to represent freelancers and self-employed persons in Singapore. Under the U FSE, the Visual, Audio, Creative Content Professionals Association (VICPA) was established in 2021 to represent creative professionals. Within the media industry, there are also numerous professional associations, such as the Singapore Association of Motion Picture Professionals (SAMPP) which represents media practitioners, the



Screenwriters Association of Singapore, and The Actors' Society, among others. The OAWs are generally sceptical about the effectiveness of such collective efforts, partly because of the impression that unions, and such organisations, have no real power in the local context, especially against the main public broadcaster, MediaCorp. The operational structure of professional associations, being largely volunteer-based, can also make operating these associations unsustainable in the long run.

Nonetheless, the OAWs voiced their hopes for the collective action process, hoping for more focus groups and sharing among the community. Through speaking out more about issues they face in this industry, they hoped that greater awareness could be created, and actual change could be implemented. There have been efforts on the ground towards the building of informal collective groups. For instance, an informal collective of workers from the lighting department have come together to create their own set of unofficial standards. Other informal groups include those formed on Facebook such as the Singapore SG Creative & Cultural Community group, and Casting Calls Singapore. These groups have enabled freelancers to form communities of support.

An industry-led body could be created to cater to the needs of all workers in the industry, and set standards for workers and working conditions. There also needs to be greater inter-sectoral awareness between the film, television and video sub-sectors in the industry, as well as different freelancers in the food chain. Finding common ground can strengthen the connections between different sub-sectors and push the industry towards finding common solutions. However, with the limited power of trade unions and such organisations within Singapore, it can be difficult for them to match up to the labour movements in other countries. If the workers in the media industry overcome their differences, and come together despite the fragmentation in the industry, it remains to be seen whether this collective action can effect change within the restrictions of Singapore's society.

## **Conclusion**

This paper provides a first step into exploring the precarity of this group of workers, and the factors that may have contributed to their precarity. The research verified that own account workers in this industry faced precarious working conditions, comparable to those mentioned in existing research (Genders, 2019; O'Donnell and Zion, 2019; Coles, 2016). Some of these conditions were attributed to limited and stagnant budgets, which are insufficient to meet the needs of production, even as the cost of living in Singapore gets more expensive. The budgets are also stretched by higher demands from the technical crew, resulting in less being allocated to other departments, and the overlooking of safety aspects and insurance needs. With the lack of an accreditation system, workers in the industry may not have suitable capabilities for the work they are doing, and hence, they may not be able to manage budget issues and safety aspects well. Production practices are not standardised, leading to inconsistent working conditions and therefore, increasing the precarity of own account workers in the industry.

Without the intervention of suitable government policies, industry regulation and standardisation, these working conditions are expected to persist for the foreseeable future. In fact, these problems have been persisting for many years. In 2010, an article in the TODAY newspaper raised similar issues, including the need for a support group, poor welfare, late payments, cashflow problems and the delayed disbursement of payments from commissioning bodies (E. Ng, 2010). These problems are not new, but "nobody wants to take on all these problems on their own" (E. Ng, 2010), which is similar to the situation today.

It can be argued that it is in the interest of all stakeholders involved to improve working conditions, and hence, contribute to the growth of the industry. In order to harness the soft power of media, and expand the interests of Singapore globally, the quality of work has to improve. If suitable budgets are disbursed and equitably allocated, production practices are standardised, and capabilities of workers are accredited, these can all contribute to improving the quality of work produced.

However, the current conditions seem to reflect that no one is taking responsibility for resolving the problems that have been persisting in the industry. There appears to be a policy gap when it comes to

film and media policy. The media regulator, IMDA, has side-lined media in their policy planning, prioritising the development of the info-communications sector, and hence, there is no concrete plan for the media sector. The main public broadcaster, MediaCorp, and the government, as the biggest buyer of services, are not setting proper standards and allocating suitable budgets. With no regulation of industry standards and work conditions, coupled with the TS Media Freelancers being guidelines which are not strictly enforced, this has contributed to the persistence of labour precarity in this industry.

Organisations which seek to balance the employer-employee relationship, and seek for greater representation for workers, are also not effective in adequately representing the freelancers in this industry. The MOM is focused on workers who are employed within the permanent employer-employee relationship, and has yet to take responsibility for own account workers in the workforce. With the reduced power of trade unions in Singapore society, the NTUC U FSE has limited tools to help the media freelancers, other than the use of advocacy and education.

At this point, it may be useful to question whether precarity is inevitable within the creative sector, and whether it can, or should, be mitigated. Menger highlighted uncertainty as a built-in characteristic of creative work, and mentioned the risk-taking behaviour of creative workers (Menger, 1999). Media freelancers, like most creative labour, thrive on uncertainty and unpredictability, which also feeds into their creativity. Hence, if their precarity is mitigated, and if these freelancers view the environment as being too safe, and too regulated, will it work against their creative autonomy, and deter them from being part of the industry?

However, the labour precarity of own account workers, regardless of their industry and occupation, needs to be recognised, and “every kind of worker should have access to collective bargaining, living wages, group insurance benefits, to disability benefits, maternity leave, etc” (Murray and Gollmitzer, 2012). The Singapore government needs to recognise the challenges facing own account workers, and expand regulations to take into account the needs of this group of workers, in the hope of improving the quality of their lives. Specific to Singapore’s film, television and video industry, the professional associations need to present a more collective front, and go beyond providing benefits to present a “more solidaristic identity and politicized understanding of the labour politics of freelance work” (Cohen, 2019). To ensure complete independence from government influence, Rajah has also suggested “creating an independent market- based, multi-stakeholder institution, separate from the NTUC-led trade unions” (Rajah, 2019). Freelancers may have more faith in such an independent institution, provided it has adequate bargaining power to effect real change in the industry.

This paper has provided a brief look into the working conditions of own account workers in Singapore’s film, television and media industry, the possible factors contributing to their precarity, and the impact, or lack thereof, of government policy and collective action. Further research could provide a more well-rounded understanding of the conditions, and suggest policy implementations that may better these conditions. The difficulty of data collection is an obstacle to gaining a complete understanding of the population of media freelancers. As such, a comprehensive baseline study will help to provide more information about the actual number of own account workers in Singapore's media industry. This would build a more concrete foundation for further policy suggestions. Also, there needs to be more in-depth research into the factors of working conditions, such as contracts and payment periods, as well as how the labour precarity affects the quality of life of media freelancers, including their financial security, retirement, healthcare and caregiving needs.

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