

Occupational Safety and Health and Temporary Agency Work in Multiemployer Restaurants

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Abstract

BACKGROUND: Current occupational safety and health (OSH) literature calls for sociotechnical, system-level approaches that increase understanding of the underlying reasons for insufficient OSH performance in non-standard employment that is associated with lower labour and social security protection when compared with traditional forms of work.

OBJECTIVE: This study focused on temporary agency work (TAW) which is a central form of nonstandard employment. The objective was to explore OSH issues in temporary agency work (TAW) in small and medium -sized multiemployer restaurants in Finland and discuss the issues from the perspectives of the agency worker, user company and agency.

METHODS: A directed content analysis method was used to examine the data obtained from semi-structured interviews (n=20) with agency workers, restaurant managers and experts representing the temporary work agencies, a pension insurer, and a labour union. The balanced work system theory was used as a framework for this qualitative analysis.

RESULTS: A variety of OSH risks and hazards in TAW were identified. In addition, the complexity of OSH management was highlighted in this triangular employment relationship between the agency worker, the user company, and the agency.

CONCLUSIONS: This study reveals problems related to OSH in TAW. Restaurants are entities separate from agencies, so establishing and adhering to a common process of OSH management is not simple.

Keywords: nonstandard employment, work conditions, work system

1. Introduction

The challenging nature of occupational safety and health (OSH) in temporary agency work (TAW) has been described well in the literature [1,2,3]. A right to work safely should be a self-evident requirement regardless of the form of work. Still the literature shows how the businesses providing and using agency work constantly struggle in their OSH activities, practices and processes [1,2,3,4]. OSH is naturally driven by legislation and beyond this, by the growing demands from the paradigm of corporate social responsibility (CSR) that urges organisations to seek sustainable and long-lasting solutions concerning human health and safety in general [4], among the organisations and in their stakeholders' networks [5,6,7,8,9].

Agency workers, who are the subjects of interest in this study, are often in a vulnerable position concerning OSH [10,11,12,13]. There is evidence that the processes for OSH risk management are insufficient in practice when the fragmented nature of TAW is considered [14]. These challenges are common in the world at large and in the Nordic countries [15]. Finland and other Nordic countries are paradigmatic welfare states, and the general assumption is that they have less contingent and precarious labour markets than many other countries [16]. Indeed, they are more egalitarian and inclusive, with ample social security, decent wages, strong labour unions and a good welfare system; thus, TAW is not completely unregulated [17]. Therefore, the companies in these countries have a solid foundation for their OSH and CSR activities. Nonetheless, in the Nordic countries, there is also evidence of the vulnerable position of the agency worker in this context [16,17].

OSH management should cover not only the traditional safety and health concerns (like

exposures to chemical and biological agents and physical and psychosocial hazards), but it should also consider the changing demographic profiles of the workforce, varying employment arrangements, intensified demands for work and the built and natural environment where the work is performed [20]. Concerning the restaurant context, which is of interest of this study, several authors [e.g., 21,22] have shown how fixed-term and agency workers tend to have higher accident and sickness rates when compared to permanent workers. As the time frame of the studies suggests [21,22], this has been known for years, but little improvement has been achieved.

OSH literature in general [15,17,18,19] and in the restaurant work context [23] calls for sociotechnical, system-level approaches to understand the underlying reasons for insufficient OSH performance and to identify the prerequisites for successful OSH management. The objective of this study is to deepen the understanding of OSH in temporary agency work (TAW) in small and medium -sized multiemployer restaurants. The balanced work system theory, a well-rooted sociotechnical concept arising from the human factors and ergonomics literature, provides a framework for such system-level considerations and enables a discussion on OSH from both the organisational and the individual perspectives [24,25,26]. With the above objective in mind, this study aims to go in detail in sociotechnical organizational contexts in TAW, with the following research questions:

- 1) How are the negative features of OSH in TAW manifested in a restaurant environment when discussed from the organisational work system perspective?
- 2) How can these features be observed when examined from the perspectives of agency workers, user companies and agencies?

2. Key concepts

The key concepts of this study are TAW in multiemployer restaurants, OSH in TAW and balanced work systems. The first two are presented in Chapters 2.1 and 2.2 to give sufficient background

understanding of the research context, while the balanced work system theory (Chapter 2.3) is presented as the analysis framework for the empirical study part.

2.1. TAW in multiemployer restaurants

TAW as one form of nonstandard employment [17,18,19] includes three parties: the user company that utilizes the labour of the workforce, the agency that provides the workforce, and the worker who does the actual work [27]. As the worker's official employer, the agency is responsible for paying wages and insurance premiums and providing occupational healthcare. The user company determines and supervises the work done on its premises [27]. In restaurant work, TAW is often facilitated through short postings – often one or two work shifts – in a workplace or for a given user company [27]. The workers come to work only when needed. These short postings ostensibly provide workers with the freedom to choose their work hours, employer(s) and type(s) of work. The actual flexibility of TAW has been questioned since TAW reflects a wider trend of increasingly contingent work; a distinction between worker-controlled and employer-controlled flexibility is needed [28,29]. From the worker perspective, it is important to understand how the employer arrangement that can be considered dualistic in a sense can lead to possible conflicts at the workplace level when the instructions provided and the expectations given do not meet [30,31]. Additionally, nonstandard employment is typically associated with lower labour and social security protection when compared with traditional forms of work [32].

Restaurants as workplaces are rather static in terms of space and equipment, but the workers are often more dynamic and diverse. Restaurant work includes various tasks performed by cooks, waiters, bartenders, porters, managers, cleaners, and entertainers, among others. Many of those tasks are taken care of by an agency through TAW arrangements. Most of the companies in the food and drink sector are SMEs [33]. For instance, in the European Union area nine out of ten

companies, in this sector are SMEs, employing altogether 2.8 million workers [33]. Small size seems to bring challenges to restaurants as evidence shows that the smaller a company is, the less clearly it sees the links between OSH and business outcomes [34,15].

When a restaurant utilises TAW, it becomes a multiemployer workplace (also known as a shared workplace), where one employer is the primary authority and more than one employer or more than one self-employed worker, gig worker or agency are working, whether simultaneously or successively [35,36,37]. As in normal employment relations, in the case of TAW workers, collaboration with managers and participation in decision making affect job satisfaction, turnover and welfare [37,38,40]. There is also a temporal dimension in multiemployer workplaces, as they imply workers being in each workplace for a limited time. When one worker leaves a shared job, that role will be filled by someone else rather than remain a vacant position [41,42]. This temporal dimension is especially pronounced in hotels and fast-food restaurants that are open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

2.2. OSH in TAW

In the TAW triangularity, companies must also comply with the statutory OSH regulations wherever they operate. However, evidence shows how companies utilising TAW can circumvent or violate OSH regulations [24,43]. At least partly, this might relate to insufficient and unsuitable OSH risk management practices, processes, and tools [14]. Additionally, communication among the three parties is often inadequate, resulting in possible misconceptions. When the user company hires an agency worker, it must define the professional requirements and special features of the work in sufficient detail and inform the temporary work agency about them. The agency must then inform the worker about these matters and ensure that the worker has the appropriate skills, experience, and overall suitability for the work to be performed. The user company must ensure that the temporary

worker is familiar with the work and the work conditions and is informed about existing OSH practices and processes and about arrangements for co-operation in the workplace [24,44,45].

2.3. Balanced work systems

Macroergonomics work systems, such as restaurants, are constantly evolving and dynamic entities [46]. According to the balanced work system theory, such work systems should be balanced with continuous development actions that minimise the systems' negative features or counterbalance them with the systems' positive features [25]. The key idea is that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, and the aim is to manage positive change in organisations by balancing systems for the optimal performance, health, and quality of working life of the workers [25,47,48]. Accordingly, multiemployer workplaces, such as the restaurants in this study, can be considered complex work system entities with environmental, organisational, technological and personnel subsystems interacting with one another in dynamic and often turbulent environments, which can be discussed as external and internal environment subsystems [46,49,50,51]. As discussed in the macroergonomics literature, the organisational subsystem may be explained from three perspectives: complexity, formalisation, and centralisation [50]. Complexity is used to describe the segmented nature of the organisation and the integration of the segments with coordinating mechanisms. Formalisation relates to the degree of standardisation. Centralisation is concerned with decision-making processes in the organisation. The personnel subsystem comprises those doing the work, and the technological subsystem relates to how the work is [49,50,51].

3. Methodology

As this study intended to acquire rich and highly informative data from the sociotechnical complexity of OSH in TAW at restaurant work, a qualitative research approach [52,53] was chosen.

The interview method is particularly suitable for studying sociotechnical work systems [54]. Hence, a semi-structured theme interview [55] was chosen as the primary data collection method for this study. Acquired interview data was processed using a directed content analysis approach [56]. A deductive analysis approach was chosen as the aim was to examine OSH in TAW in restaurant work from the perspectives of the environmental, organisational, technological and personnel subsystems (i.e., the balanced work system theory) [24,25,26].

3.1. Data collection

Five SME restaurants employing a total of 49 permanent workers and 21 agency workers constituted the research environment in this qualitative study. The restaurants were owned by private parties, had operated for over ten years, and served both food and alcohol. The restaurants were small in the number of employees (8–20) and light in terms of their organisational structures, with a top manager, a pair of shift managers and 5–17 permanent workers. The number of agency workers varied by the week, ranging from zero to six.

The empirical data were obtained from semi-structured theme interviews [55] conducted in January–February 2021. The questions were based on the Conditions for Work Effectiveness Questionnaire-II (CWEQ-II) [38,57]. The CWEQ-II measures access to different structures of opportunities that include possibilities for learning and mobility within the organisation; obtaining the formal and informal knowledge needed to work effectively; receiving feedback and guidance from subordinates, peers, and superiors; and having the financial means, materials, time, equipment, and supplies required to do the work. The CWEQ-II also measures the power structure in two dimensions – formal and informal power. Formal power is derived from job characteristics, such as flexibility, adaptability, creativity, decision making, visibility and importance to an organisation's purpose and goals. Informal power is derived from social connections and the development of communication and information channels among superiors, peers, subordinates, and outside parties

[38,47,48,57].

The CWEQ-II themes are highly compatible with the balanced work system theory, so it was chosen for application in this study. However, the research group decided to administer the questionnaire in an interview format for three reasons: the survey would not likely produce answers in the level of detail needed for this study, asking open-ended questions in the interviews offered flexibility, and customized open-ended questions were added. Overall, 20 interviews were conducted. The interviewees represented restaurant managers (5), agency workers from the same restaurants (7), managers of temporary work agencies (5) and experts (3). Concerning the experts, one worked for a labour union for people working in the service sector, and two held senior expert positions in a large nationwide pension insurer. Participation in the interviews was voluntary, and the interviewees provided their informed consent. Each interview lasted for 45 minutes on average. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. Written notes were taken during the interviews to support the analysis.

This study was part of a larger European Social Fund project (Sustainable gig work, S21965), which was approved in the fall of 2020 by the Human Sciences Ethics Committee of the Helsinki Region Universities of Applied Sciences. In conducting this study, principles of good research ethics were followed, based on the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity and the General Data Protection Regulation [58,59].

3.2. Analysis

In the analysis phase, a directed content analysis [53,56] was applied with NVivo software [60]. The analysis process is described in Table 1 based on the 16 steps guideline for directed content analysis by Assarroudi et al. [56].

Insert Table 1 here

4. Results

This section describes the complexity of TAW in the SME restaurant context. First, the operating environment (i.e., the environmental subsystem) is described to facilitate understanding based on the premise of this service-oriented work. The focus is then shifted to the restaurant level, where the organisational, personnel and technical subsystems are discussed. Subsections 4.1–4.4 include direct quotations from the interviews to concretise the presented findings. The quotations were translated from Finnish to English by the corresponding author.

4.1. Environmental subsystem

Any discussion of OSH in restaurants must account for the essential role played by the customers. As pointed out in the interviews, customers often bring along different concerns and challenges from the OSH perspective. The interviewees – both the managers and the agency workers – noted that the strain and stress caused by the customers can be high. This is not only because of inappropriate customer behaviour, but it may also reflect the workers' feelings about their responsibilities for the customers. Customers' improper behaviours are manifested as verbal abuse, threats, and sexual harassment, especially towards female workers. According to the managers and the workers, the threats of violence have risen, and customers under the influence of narcotic substances seem to appear more frequently than had been the case in the past. Conflicts between customers appear to be on the rise as well, and workers are easily caught in the middle of these disputes. For instance, workers' responsibility as a stressful sensation emerges when a customer asks for help in a threatening situation involving another customer or if a customer demands more alcohol despite already being heavily intoxicated. Sometimes, workers must also have the skills to listen to customers talking about their difficult life problems. The challenging nature of customer service doubling as an outlet for customers to vent their feelings was highlighted by agency worker

A:

In this work, we have a lot of interaction with people. It is constant, and you have to be able to somehow give the customer the feeling that you're listening, and you exist just for that customer. In the long run, it gets really tiresome.

It is also worth pointing out that the restaurant work in the context of this study took place in the evenings and later at night. This was regarded as difficult for workers' social relationships, as the circadian rhythm of a restaurant worker can be quite different from what other people think of as normal. Working late into the evening was viewed as limiting social contacts outside work hours and steering people towards social interactions with those in the same line of work. The fact that a restaurant employee working mainly at night may experience problems with the rhythms of everyday life and face challenges in addressing needs, which was seen as a challenge with having also occupational health implications to the workers. The interviews with the workers indicated that managers must pay more attention to workers getting days off during the week, not only to manage their personal affairs, but also to ensure that legislation regarding work hours is followed. Agency worker D presented this view of restaurant work:

Social burdens in this area are very strong because of evening and night work, and workers are living on a night schedule. That causes most of the stress ... and social circles are large but also very closed.

Restaurant work was considered socially intensive, with various risks arising from this intensity. The interviewees emphasised how the influence of work reaches beyond work hours. They described restaurant work as an element of a holistic lifestyle in which leisure time was also

spent to a significant degree in restaurant environments. Thus, the interviewees considered the risk of alcohol abuse to be high among restaurant workers. This holistic lifestyle was seen posing other significant risks to mental health as it was perceived as creating and supporting a certain “culture of silence” in the work community. The interviewees pointed out how restaurant workers – especially agency workers – do not dare to speak up about the problems they face. They were afraid of losing friends, their wider social circle and even future job opportunities if they would start discussions on difficult and sensitive topics, including OSH. A conversation on customer feedback was a constantly utilised mean to initiate a discussion among the management, permanent employees, and agency workers. This was intended to ease the psycho-social burden of work in the work community. However, some agency workers tended to be excluded because they often left the site immediately after their shifts and thus did not participate in experience-sharing sessions.

4.2. Organisational subsystem

The organisational subsystem constitutes both organisational and managerial practices and processes. Despite being considered small in the number of their employees, all five restaurants included in this study had some common characteristics, such as segmented personnel structures with TAW arrangements. Typically, TAW arrangements were used for bartenders and waiters and to a certain extent, for jobs/positions such as a disc jockey (DJ), a cleaner or a porter. The interviewees highlighted the complexity of managing such a segmented workforce, where certain workers work only on a few occasions and others have a permanent contract. From the process and task formalisation perspective, the interviewees pointed out how the work methods had been established through a long line of practice and changes were only rarely considered. Both the restaurant and agency managers noted how new workers, not depending on their contract terms, should be able to work efficiently and safely. Personnel training was commonly used to transfer the necessary knowledge to new workers, but some uncertainties at a practical level were identified in the

interviews. Specifically, the question is whether a new agency worker is eventually trained by the agency or the restaurant itself. In practice, restaurant managers usually provide initial training and later organise supplementary training in collaboration with their commercial partners, such as suppliers of liquor companies. As the approaches for training and the stakeholders providing training vary, these raise the question of the quality and the uniformity of OSH training. While the restaurants might have formal training processes, in practice, they are still viewed as affected by the availability of collaborators and agency procedures, as expressed by agency manager 1:

Whether work is agency work or ordinary work, the orientation to work is usually conducted, yet still too many times it is like “throwing worker into the deep end of the pool and see how the worker is doing”. If they sink, only then they are helped in any way. Therefore, we are trying to make everything work despite the multitude of modes of operations of our partners.

Both proactive and passive styles of OSH management were identified in the interviews. The passive style of restaurant managers manifested itself in thinking that it is necessary only to follow the rules set by the authorities and react to incidents and accidents only when they occur. In this way of reactive thinking, some restaurant and agency managers regarded everything as being at a good level if the legal requirements are fulfilled, and no incidents and accidents have occurred. However, a few of the interviewed restaurant and agency managers noted that this kind of thinking could lead to a false sense of security; some potential hazards might not be recognised at all or might be identified but falsely managed as unimportant. In general, it was seen how OSH is highly dependent on the capabilities of the restaurant manager as the central decision maker determining the actions (if any) to improve OSH. In the case of a multiemployer workplace, this was considered even more challenging. The employees, especially the agency workers, were perceived as easily and sometimes falsely relying on the assumption that someone has taken care of the OSH risks and that

they can perform their work safely. This was described well by agency worker A:

Workers must be in the dark They do not know what is going on but work anyway ... until something happens Sometimes, when something stupid comes from higher management that is not even present, the immediate superior is usually able to slow down or ignore that stupid command.

However, OSH management was not considered fully passive, and proactive means to improve OSH were also identified in the interviews. The restaurants and agencies which had adopted a proactive style of OSH management had found ways to support the work community, learn from past incidents and accidents, and increase the shared responsibility throughout the organisation without forgetting the official power structure of decision making. In these cases, the workers' experiences and skills were valued, and they were offered, not depending on their contract status, the possibility to participate in knowledge sharing. In these cases, the process was facilitated by pair work, where a more experienced worker tutored a new hire, or a permanent worker mentored an agency worker. Proactive decision making and a shared responsibility for OSH emerge in this quotation from agency worker B:

Yes, if I notice something wrong and I think that something could be handled in some other better way, then I will always say so. Each of us is experienced enough that everyone is trusted to do their own thing independently ... and look after others' safety.

4.3. Personnel subsystem

At first sight, the personnel subsystem in the five restaurants might seem rather simple because they

had their own workforce but also constantly utilised TAW. The interviewees emphasised how communication and OSH risk management often worked well in the work community but were considered as less successful when the agencies were involved. These inter-organisational communication challenges were traced back all the way to the personnel selection processes. In principle, personnel selection in the restaurants was perceived as including two paths – permanent positions and TAW – from which the latter was criticised by the interviewees in restaurant management positions. It was concluded that the agencies do not always provide the user companies (i.e., the restaurants) with sufficient information on the agency workers' qualifications in general and their OSH skills and knowledge. The interviewees pointed out how the user company can in principle express its wishes, but in practice, the agency selects the workers. The interviewees reported that TAW may also pose a challenge from the career and skills development perspective. Often in this field, skills and knowledge are achieved over time through increased experience and training, but concerning TAW, certain limitations should be acknowledged. The agency workers do not always have enough time to learn and understand the restaurant's entire practices and processes in depth, but they must try to apply little of everything everywhere. In turn, this was viewed as a potential challenge from the OSH management perspective, as explained by agency worker A:

Temporary agency workers who work in several restaurants see the ways in which different restaurants operate and do things. But the downside is that you may not be able to commit properly and delve in detail into that work community; you must do everything superficially without knowing better, and that predisposes you to hazards ... and then, something happens.

The interviewed restaurant managers found the formal contracts between the restaurant and the agency to be very restrictive if they want to hire a good agency worker on a permanent basis. In

such cases, the restaurant could be fined by the agency for violating the contract. This contractual issue was considered highly problematic by both managers and workers since they could not improve the situation themselves, with power over their affairs handed to the agency. The subsequent feeling of helplessness affects OSH, at least indirectly. Compounding the above-mentioned issue, the interviewed agency workers considered themselves often failing to earn the special recognition and rewards that the permanent workforce receive. Agency workers regarded this as decreasing their commitment and motivation to work to the best of their abilities. Both managers and workers point out that they know how rest and recreation can improve worker health and well-being and think that these also lower the risks of accidents at work. However, agency workers have more difficulties in planning their lives outside work hours as they must be prepared to take work shifts on short notice. They considered it stressful to be constantly on standby. The interviewees noted that the agency workers often have jobs in different restaurants at the same time. Over a longer timeframe, the complexity of this multiemployer and multijob environment from the agency worker perspective was regarded as hazardous in the OSH context. Agency worker C presents a typical situation for an agency worker:

Often, a gig or a temporary worker does another job. I think that on a longer [time] scale, it threatens workers' health because workers do not get enough rest; the body is constantly changing rhythm or something like that ... getting sick more easily, if a worker is tired, things can't be handled properly. If these things are bothering the worker, either physically or mentally, then it is quite possible to discuss the matter ... in those good workplaces and whether it is possible to get help in any way.

Managers identified the uncertainty of TAW as an easily exploited feature and a challenge

from the OSH management perspective. When agency workers fear losing their jobs or future work opportunities, managers noticed that they worked harder and did not take a sick leave when needed. Additionally, managers regarded them as not upholding their right to safe work. The silence of agency workers brings challenges to all involved in TAW, as the pension insurer brought forth:

If the user company is not so responsible that it does not want to take care of the temporary and agency workers as well as its own personnel, then it brings a big challenge, from my pension company's perspective; how to find and intervene all these risk workers that could at worst, face work disability risks.

4.4. Technological subsystem

Concerning the last element of the work system, the technical subsystem, the identified challenges were more superficial than in the other subsystems. The tasks performed by the agency workers varied only slightly among the restaurants. Furthermore, the work methods and the work equipment were considered somewhat similar among all five restaurants. Similarly, the workplace was considered rather safe from the physical work environment perspective. All five restaurants had good air conditioning and well-aligned and appropriate illumination, and cleanliness was the rule. The passageways were kept open to prevent tripping hazards.

The physical setups of the workstations followed in principle a common design in each of the restaurants. Hence, physical workload factors, such as the amount of time spent standing, unilateral movement, lifting things in uncomfortable positions and repeated movements, were considered rather similar in each restaurant. From the OSH management perspective, this was regarded as an advantage, as the workers were familiar with common work environment risks and considered able to adapt themselves sufficiently. In summary, from the technical subsystem perspective, work in the restaurants was considered highly routinised, as stated by agency worker B:

In the restaurant industry, variation is rare in the ways of working, and they are 90% similar in all the restaurants. However, the ergonomics of the work environment has been invested in over the last ten years. Still, there is a lot of standing and leaning.

4.5. Negative features of TAW in restaurant work from the work system perspective

The above analyses describe the restaurants utilising TAW as macroergonomics work system entities. The work system categorisation helps understanding the variety and depth of the negative OSH features in this kind of multiemployer environment. From the sociotechnical system perspective, these all should be acknowledged and rectified to enable sustainable OSH management processes with long-lasting effects. Table 2 summarises these features from the triangular relationship perspective in the restaurant context. The complexity of this relationship clearly emerges when these negative features are considered from the balanced work system perspective. The analysis shows how improvements in OSH would benefit all three stakeholders in the triangular relationship. However, as Table 2 shows, the benefits may be indirect in nature; in turn, this may hamper the discussion on development actions and their costs among the three stakeholders.

Insert table 2 here

5. Discussion

This study helps in understanding the complexity of OSH in SME restaurant environments where TAW is constantly utilised. As this study shows, agency workers are in many ways in a more vulnerable position than permanent workers. This is alarming, as the right to work safely should not

depend on the workers' contract status. The macroergonomics analysis sums up the negative features of the work system in this context. To gain balance for the overall system, the balanced work system theory [e.g.,24] urges to focus development actions on these negative features, and if this is found to be a difficult or impossible task, to further develop the positive. The analysis indicates that the work systems from this TAW perspective are unbalanced and development actions are needed at all subsystem categories and in their interactions.

As this study shows, the degree of professionalism concerning OSH skills and knowledge can be questioned, not only from the worker perspective, but also from the organisation viewpoint. As the results indicate, all three key stakeholder groups (agency workers, user companies and temporary work agencies) in this triangular relationship face – directly or indirectly – the consequences related to improper OSH. The complexities related to the business, employment, and management processes and their interconnections inside this triangular relationship make it challenging to reach sustainable OSH development. Not a single stakeholder can manage or develop the situation alone. In the light of this study, it is evident that the agency worker is in a vulnerable position when it comes to OSH. That is not however surprising given the precarious nature of agency work in general. From this perspective, this study supplements the findings of Kauhanen and Nätti's study [61], who have discussed in general how user companies may either intentionally or unintentionally neglect their responsibilities and inadequately communicate agency worker concerns to the workers' actual employer, the agency.

As for influencing the agencies, which hold the most power in defining the working relationship, both workers and restaurants have limited options as shown in our study. Similar findings are also reported for instance by Balliester and Elsheikhi [18], who have discussed agency workers' decreased bargaining power and reduced legal protection. From a broader perspective (beyond traditional accident-focused considerations), the findings of this study can be interpreted illustrating weaknesses at cultural, psychosocial, and socioeconomic levels with diverse impacts on

the restaurant workers' job security, mental health and even on their social relationships. Hence, from the OSH perspective this study deepens the findings of Hünefeld et al. [2], who have discussed challenges related to the job satisfaction and mental health among agency workers in general. The findings of this study also expand Golubovskaya's team's [62] findings on the challenges frontline workers as service providers provide from the OSH perspective.

5.1. Practical implications

Certain characteristics of restaurant work should be acknowledged when discussing the development actions in practice. From the work process perspective, restaurants as work environments and the tasks performed there can be seen rather simple. Nonetheless, restaurants are also labour intensive and customer oriented, which add difficulty to the job. Based on this study, the responsibilities related to OSH in TAW seemed partially unclear when examined from the viewpoints of the stakeholders. As a simplified solution one could propose removing the boundaries between the employers (agencies and the user companies) involved, with the purpose of facilitating operations by combining their functions under only one operator. In a sense this could however be interpreted as a mean to step back to more traditional work and employment practices. Another practical approach would be to develop better OSH co-operation models, information sharing channels and practical tools between the agencies and the user companies.

The prevailing cultural factors of the restaurant work affect OSH in practice by limiting the nature of the interactions among the stakeholders, keeping the relationships superficial and forcing the restaurants to operate under unspoken rules. In practice, this culture may lead to reactive OSH management actions, where managers regard "handling" these issues by focusing on the good aspects and keeping things calm concerning the negative aspects and thus undermining their own workplace atmosphere. Creating a sustainable atmosphere in this context with three stakeholder groups with sometimes competing interests is naturally complex. To facilitate the development

process, the stakeholders should strive for an open and inclusive working environment with clear processes and practices for reporting faults and problems encountered and for managing those. From the OSH management perspective, this is certainly not a revolutionary initiative. The idea that everyone associated with the workplace is actively involved in observing the workplace and for reporting potential hazards is an essential element of the OSH management practices and processes [e.g. 63].

In the context of this study, it should be noted that also socioeconomic factors, including the segmentation between the permanent employees and the agency workers in the restaurant may limit participation in the above activities and commitment to work. This may be intentional or unintentional. In general, the workers seek better-paying, more secure jobs, which is especially true in the case of agency workers. This leads to the remaining workers having less motivation, education, and experience; they might also have limited awareness of OSH issues. Therefore, a recurring OSH training should be considered important also for the agency workers. Psychosocial discomfort must also be considered from the OSH management perspective; especially in the case of frontline workers who are in direct contact with customers, they need to restrict their behaviour to a particular professional way, often causing discomfort. As the agency workers are often less experienced than the restaurant's own employees and lack the ability to confront a challenging customer, they need organisational-level measures to protect their OSH in these situations (e.g., not working alone, porter available, pressing the "panic button"). Another way to transfer individual-level challenges to the organisational level is the use of technological means to reduce the workload and further decrease OSH risks. Automating crushed ice making is a good example of using technological means to transfer from a labour- and time-intensive manual operation to an automatic machine function that benefits all workers and eliminates the time-consuming process.

5.2. Strengths and limitations of this study and proposals for future studies

To enable evaluation of this study, the research process was described following the 16 steps guideline for directed content analysis by Assarroudi et al. [56]. The application of the CWEQ-II in the form of an interview instead of a questionnaire can be considered a strength of this study. In this way, more in-depth information was obtained without the limitations of the questionnaire, as the interviewees were able to discuss in detail the aspects that they considered important. Additionally, the research team was able to contact and listen to agency workers freely. Most of the agency worker and manager interviews were conducted alone by the corresponding author to increase confidentiality between the interviewee and the interviewer. However, the interviews were recorded and transcribed to enable the research team to participate in the analyses.

The sample set limitations as it was chosen based on the invited participants' willingness to respond, thus delimiting the number of interviewees. The sample was also limited to the agency workers who had a job during the period when this study was conducted. The relatively small number of the restaurants should also be considered, despite a certain saturation level being reached in the interviews. As another limitation, it should be noted that this study was conducted in only one country, Finland and focused only on small restaurants. Thus, the context must be understood when interpreting the results. Nonetheless, this study can also be viewed as a practical response to a research gap, as Rasmussen et al. [17] have called for empirical studies in this research area in the Nordic context.

While this study focused on the negative features of OSH in TAW at restaurant work it would be valuable to investigate in the future the positive side, i.e., through what kinds of actions good OSH has been developed and ensured in multiemployer restaurant environments. Such a study would shift the focus from the problems confronted to successes achieved. By this new research would in its part contribute to a topical discussion on the paradigm changes in safety research. Current OSH literature urges to shift the focus from traditional accident and incident centric safety

thinking towards individual and organisational resilience [64] and on the readiness of the organisation to select the most suitable pathways for their safety improvements [65]. As another topic for future research, this study could be reiterated in other countries and in other occupations (either in countries with similar working cultures, like in another Nordic country or in a totally different context). In addition, as this study focused on SMEs, future studies with similar settings could focus on different sized enterprises like multinational companies and restaurant chains.

6. Conclusions

Restaurants are entities separate from agencies, even if they operate as multiemployers, so establishing and adhering to a common process of OSH management is not simple. The OSH processes by the user companies (i.e., the restaurants) and the agencies differ because their core business functions are different. The former operates in an environment serving their clients whilst the core function for the latter one is to supply workers to that environment. If a restaurant is unsatisfied with a given agency worker, it can simply replace that worker with another. In this process, the agency receives its payment despite the outcome, and the costs of the decreased productivity are borne by the restaurant. In turn, the costs for possible occupational accidents or illnesses occurred to agency workers are allocated to the actual employer, that is, the agency. Although Finnish companies have a solid foundation for OSH activities by being based on a Nordic welfare state, it seems that the situation in Finland does not differ much from the situations in the rest of the world. Similar challenges come forth but with different nuances. Likewise, contingency and precariousness are present in TAW, and compared with regular full-time workers, agency workers are in a weaker position regarding OSH matters.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Ethical approval

This study was part of a larger European Social Fund project (Sustainable gig work, S21965), which was approved in the fall of 2020 by the Human Sciences Ethics Committee of the Helsinki Region Universities of Applied Sciences.

Informed consent

Research subjects gave their consent to participate. Procedure was documented.

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Table 1. Description of the research process from the perspective of 16 steps of the directed content analysis [56].

<p>Step 1: The authors had accumulated in-depth understanding about the Balanced work system theory and about the mastery of the directed content analysis based on their previous research experience.</p>
<p>Step 2: The sample size was sketched by the authors based on their previous research experience. In addition, the Sustainable gig work project group and the steering committee of the project were consulted on the sample size and the expected saturation point for the data.</p>
<p>Step 3: Manifest content was selected as the primary data for the analysis. In addition, the transcripts included latent content. Latent content was acknowledged as a secondary data supporting the analysis.</p>
<p>Step 4: Interview guide was developed by the interdisciplinary project group. The interview guide was based on the CWEQ-II questionnaire [38].</p>
<p>Step 5: The main author conducted all interviews and the other authors participated in the group interviews. Interviews were recorded and transcribed for the analyses.</p>
<p>Step 6: Based on the Balanced work system theory [25,48,49,50], individual agency workers were selected as the primary unit of analysis for RQ1. For RQ2, the three parties in TAW (agency worker, user company and agency) were selected as the secondary units of analysis.</p>
<p>Step 7: Interview transcripts were read and reviewed several times by the researcher group to reach general understanding about the topic.</p>
<p>Step 8: A formative categorization matrix was formed by the authors based on the Balanced work system theory.</p>
<p>Step 9: Categories for the analysis were theoretically defined by the Balanced work system theory.</p>
<p>Step 10: Based on the general understanding gathered in Step 7, the coding rules for the categories were discussed and agreed by the authors.</p>
<p>Step 11: The main author conducted a test analysis for the categorization.</p>
<p>Step 12: The main author selected suitable quotations as anchor samples for each main category. The suitability of the quotations was discussed by the authors.</p>
<p>Step 13: The main analysis was conducted with the NVivo software by the main author. In the software, the color codes were used to identify the units of analysis by the category and then the software collected them to their categories.</p>
<p>Step 14: Categories by the Balanced work system theory were abstracted to summarize the negative OSH features in TAW.</p>
<p>Step 15: A matrix table was created to link the negative OSH features to the perspectives of the agency worker, user company and the agency.</p>
<p>Step 16: A description of the research process, data, data analysis and the findings were created and reported in this article.</p>

Table 2. Negative features related to the utilisation of TAW in the restaurant context when considered from the OSH and the work system perspectives.

Subsystem	Negative features	Possible outcomes for key stakeholders		
		Agency worker	User company	Agency
External environment	Challenging customers	Perceived strain and stress and threat of violence	Creates a hazardous workplace for all employees and increases the need for external security services	Potential indirect effects through employees' health issues and reduced well-being*
Internal environment	Socially intensive work	Impact of work extended beyond work hours, making it difficult to recover from work	Workplace is not able to ease the psycho-social burden of work. Culture of silence formed in the company	Potential indirect effects through employees' health issues and reduced well-being*
Organisational	Agency workers' inadequate OSH skills and knowledge	Vulnerability to different kinds of OSH hazards	Insufficiently skilled employees in the workplace increase possibilities of different OSH hazards	Agency workers exposed to different OSH hazards that they are incapable of coping with*

	Insufficient OSH management processes and reward systems	Agency workers do not report OSH hazards confronted	Insufficient knowledge of possible OSH hazards in the workplace	Various procedures that might conflict with user company's efforts*
Personnel	Insufficient OSH communication among the stakeholders	Makes the agency workers unaware of the OSH risks in the workplace	Uncertainty about whether all employees are aware of the OSH risks	Potential indirect effects through employees' health issues and reduced well-being*
	Vagueness of contracts	Requires being constantly available for job offers and little power to negotiate on the work tasks offered	Unable to select the most suitable agency worker from the OSH skills and knowledge perspective	Potential indirect effects through employees' health issues and reduced well-being*
Technical	Physically demanding tasks	Perceived physical strain and stress that may lead to adverse health outcomes	Minimal, as the user company can replace the workers based on their contracts	Potential indirect effects through employees' health issues and reduced well-being *

* The effects may lead to substantial economic costs. For instance, the costs related to long sick leaves, premature disability pensions and occupational accidents are allocated to the actual employer, that is, the agency.