

Trapped Versus Stepping Stones: Work Trajectories of Young Workers During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract : The COVID-19 pandemic represents an externally induced force as they face a combination of reduced work, dismissal, and job change for young precarious workers. The paper drew insights from two interview waves of the in-work poverty study in Singapore which were conducted a year apart. By analysing respondents' job histories before and at the start of the pandemic as well as their job experiences over the two waves of interviews, the study found the presence of what scholars describe as trap and stepping stone trajectories. Trap trajectories refer to how the nature of precarious employment leads respondents to be in dead-end jobs with no room for progression while stepping stone trajectories refer to how poor work provides opportunities for the accumulation of work experiences. We also look at how structure, agency and biographical factors affect job trajectories and discuss the impacts of COVID-19 on work experiences and the implications of the bifurcation of trajectory outcomes on poverty and inequality among the young working poor in Singapore.

Keywords : working poor, precarity, young workers, COVID-19, work trajectories

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