

Agency workers' experiences of working in the restaurant industry

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<p>Employment through agencies is becoming a common way of employment, especially among teenagers and young adults. Agencies are known for opening job opportunities for inexperienced employees. The agency industry has taken a hold of the restaurant industry and a growing number of employees are employed to restaurants through agencies.</p> <p>This thesis was made to help understand the agency industry from the employees' point of view. The research concentrates on the experiences of agency workers. The purpose of this thesis is to understand what drives people to choose agency work as well as give insights into the positive and negative sides of agency work.</p> <p>The thesis consists of the theoretical framework and the qualitative research. The theoretical framework focuses on how the agency industry operates in Finland including current events affecting the industry. The qualitative research was executed by interviewing four agency workers and examining their experiences by comparing them to each other and the theoretical framework. The interviewees are all in their twenties in similar situations in their lives and have worked for an agency from one to three years.</p> <p>The interviews revealed that the interviewees are mostly satisfied with their experiences of working through an agency. There are still developments that the interviewees would like to see in the industry such as better benefits for the employees, more detailed orientation, better communication from the agency and equal treatment for agency employees working as extras.</p>	
Keywords	
Agency work, Restaurant industry, Employee experiences,	

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1 Introduction

Having worked through an agency myself, I have first-hand experience of agency work. When thinking about the topic for my thesis, I was thinking of my experiences and became aware that agency employees' opinions and experiences from the field are not usually presented in an unbiased way. They are often painted in a positive way and presented by the agencies themselves and their media channels. I wanted to interview employees to find out what they thought of their experiences and to give them a platform to express honest opinions about the industry.

The goal of this research is to gather the interviewees' experiences of working through agencies and their thoughts and opinions about the agencies they have worked for. The experiences presented in this research will be from young adults working through agencies in restaurants, cafes, and bars. These experiences will include overall satisfaction as well as equality at workplaces, orientation at the new restaurant, and other topics related to agency work. The positive and negative sides of agency work will be evaluated and presented equally. The research questions that have guided this research are the following:

Why do people choose agency work over traditional employment?

What are the positive and negative sides of agency work?

Do the interviewees prefer working for one or several restaurants?

Have the interviewees faced discrimination against agency workers?

Would agency workers recommend working through an agency in the restaurant industry?

I was intrigued by understanding what drives young adults to work through an agency in the restaurant industry. Some young adults have a part-time job or work in restaurants during the summer while studying another profession. I wanted to discover how the interviewees ended up working through an agency. The research explores the two different ways of working for an agency; employees who work only for one restaurant and employees who take shifts from different restaurants. I wanted to find out how these styles affect the employees' experiences of working in the restaurant industry and which way of working is more enjoyable in the employees' opinion. Some employees might be working in both ways and I wanted to understand which way they would prefer.

The theoretical analysis concentrates on defining how agencies work in Finland. It will inspect the collective agreement in the service industry and how it affects the agency workers in the restaurant industry. The theoretical analysis will include the challenges of

agency work and how they affect the industry and the parties involved in the employment. It will also refer to current problems including Covid-19 and its effects on the restaurant industry in Finland and the employment of agency workers.

The research was conducted as a qualitative research. I chose to use qualitative methods to get the most comprehensive answers from the agency workers. I wanted to conduct interviews in person so that I was able to ask follow-up questions and get even more insights into their experiences. This would not have been possible with other interview styles. I believe that I would have not gotten answers this detailed if I had used other research methods either. The results of these interviews will be compared to the theoretical framework later in the thesis when discussing the experiences and opinions of the interviewees.

This research can help people to understand the experiences of an agency worker and what drives people to choose agencies instead of other employers. This research does not have a commissioner, but I believe that it will be beneficial for anyone working or planning to work in the agency industry or the restaurant industry. It can also be beneficial for young people who are interested in working for an agency in the restaurant field to understand how the industry works and what to expect from it.

2 Agency work

An agency worker is a term used of a person who has an employment contract with an agency that leases employees for other companies. An agency worker works for a user company that is entitled to lead and supervise the employee's work. (Hietala, Kaivanto & Schön 2014.) The terms regulars or regular employees are used when referring to people who are employed traditionally by the restaurant and not through an agency. Regular agency workers mean people who work for one restaurant regularly but are employed through an agency. Extra agency workers, extras or temporary agency workers are terms used of employees that have one or few shifts at a restaurant and they switch employer restaurants frequently.

2.1 Agency work in Finland

Agency work has three different parties: the agency, the user company, and the employee. Therefore, the employee has two employers, the agency, and the restaurant or restaurants they are working for. The official employer is the agency that takes care of salaries and social expenses. However, the employee works in the restaurant's facilities and is under their management. (Tanskanen 2012, 72.)

In their research Tanskanen (2012, 76) found that most agency workers in Finland are on average younger than other employees. Agency workers are more likely to be students and unmarried. The research also showed that agency workers usually belong to lower socioeconomic statuses and have lower education.

The ability to choose where and when to work is extremely beneficial for the employee. This is one of the most common reasons why agency workers decide to work through an agency. Some of the agency workers experience that they are more able to control their shifts than a regular employee at the company. Resigning from the job is made quite easy for the employees as well. It is common for students to finance their studies by doing agency work because the flexible nature of the work is advantageous for them. (Hietala & al. 2014.)

In the hotel and catering industry, it is far more common to work through an agency than traditional employment. The amount of agency workers is almost four times more in proportion to other employees. The restaurant industry might be dependent on the agency industry and as such, employees may be working through an agency even if they would not

want to. This phenomenon is common in the agency industry, but especially among restaurant employees. (Tanskanen 2012, 75-78.) Therefore, agencies open the labour market to people who would not necessarily get or want to work as a regular in the restaurant industry. Agencies give a chance for inexperienced workers to gain experience at the beginning of their careers. (Hietala & al. 2014.)

2.2 Employees' rights according to the collective agreement

This chapter will discuss the laws that apply to employees working through agencies according to the service industries' trade union PAM's collective agreement. This collective agreement applies to agency workers as well as other employees working in the service industry (PAM 2020b.)

In the collective agreement, it is stated that regular working hours for an employee are a maximum of 112,5 hours in three weeks. One shift should be longer than 4 hours and 10 hours is the longest shift that can be given to an employee. If these limits are to be exceeded the employer will need consent from the employee. With consent, the maximum length of one shift can be 16 hours. There should also be a break of 11 hours between shifts unless the employee has given agreement otherwise, then the limit is 8 hours. If the shift is over 6 hours the employee should have a lunch break of 30 minutes as well as a coffee break that is included in all shifts over 4 hours. (PAM 2020a.)

Wellbeing at work is defined in the collective agreement as enjoyable and effortless work in a safe and healthy environment where the working environment and colleagues support the employee's career. Developing well-being at work can add to productivity. Regular performance reviews are a vital part of developing well-being. It is recommended to make a work well-being program or taking other measures towards wellbeing with the employees of the company. The measures taken can include discussing the effects of shift planning on wellbeing, managing the stress of night shifts and shift work, and improving the work environment and its ergonomics. Well-being can also be developed by supporting healthy living habits and their effects on the employee's wellbeing and recognising bullying, harassment, and sexual harassment and taking actions to prevent it from happening. By emphasising the importance of leadership, it can help in creating a good and beneficial working environment and in upholding the ability to work. These measures can be discussed in performance reviews to get the employee's opinions weighed in the decision making as well. (PAM 2020a.)

Threats of violence at a workplace should be prevented by making the working environment safe to work at and by instructing employees on safety measures. Preventative steps can be designing the working space so that it is safe to work at. It is also important to make sure that police or security can be easily reached in case of violence at the workplace. A working environment can be made safer by having clear instructions in case of a violent situation and giving each employee instructions on how to act safely in a violent situation. Therefore, the employees will know what to do and will be more likely to be able to deescalate the situation. If a violent situation has happened the employer has to arrange after-treatment for an employee that has been in a threatening situation. (PAM 2020a.)

In the case of sick leave, the collective agreement states that the employer must pay salary for a period of illness if the employee has worked for the company for at least one month. If the employee is unable to do their job due to an illness or accident and has not caused the disability to work themselves the previous statement will apply to the sick payment. It will also apply if the employee has been ordered to stay in quarantine according to the Communicable Diseases Act. The employee is obligated to notify their employer personally if they have become ill. If the employer demands it, the employee should be able to prove their inability to work with a doctor's certificate. This is not always necessary if the sick leave is less than 3 days. (PAM 2020a.)

2.3 Challenges of working through an agency

The biggest problem with agency work is its unreliable nature. This is a problem that applies to both the employee and the user company. It can also have effects on the user company's regular employees that are not employed through an agency. (Hietala & al. 2014.) This chapter will discuss the most common issues facing agency work from the employers and the employee's point of view.

For the user company, the challenges are typically related to the agency workers competence and long-term commitment to the company. The challenges can also include issues with continuing orientation of new employees and other resources needed with changing staff. This can lead to poor quality orientation for the agency workers which can lead to a decrease in employees' productivity. For the regular staff, the usage of agency workers can become an issue if all the workforce is outsourced to agencies. This is an issue many employees have faced, and this can create uncertainty among the regular employees as well. (Hietala & al. 2014.)

From the agency workers point of view, the biggest challenges have to do with the duration of employment and the amount of work and shifts available (Hietala & al. 2014.) It can be a challenge for the agency worker not being able to have regular income if there are no shifts available for them regularly (PAM 2020b.) Agency contracts are typically short term, and the average length is around four months. Many of the agency workers have expressed that the reason they work through an agency is that there is nothing else available. In a situation like this, the short nature of the contract and uncertainty of continuation can be an emotional burden. (Hietala & al. 2014.) Uncertainty of the future of employment can cause stress. Some employers do not adhere to giving notice and therefore long-term employment of the agency worker might end suddenly. Continuous uncertainty might make it hard to build a steady life. (PAM 2020b.)

It is common for agency workers to feel like outsiders in their work community and they might experience that they get more of the unwanted tasks and shifts than regulars (Hietala & al. 2014.) Continuously having to learn new colleagues, methods of working and working environments can become exhausting and stressful. Working through an agency for several restaurants needs continuous adjustment. There are also prejudices towards agency workers in some workplaces and communities and the regulars do not always look kindly on changing staff and new agency workers. (PAM 2020b.)

The lack of a work community and employee benefits are some of the notable disadvantages. Agency workers do not usually have the same work benefits as the other employees. This includes health benefits such as sick pay. (PAM 2020b.) According to the ministry of employment and the economy of Finland agency workers have the same rights to get sick payment during sick leave as any other regular employee. If the employee has worked for less than a month then they are entitled to 50% of their normal salary. However, the payment for sick leave has been can be deviated from. The collective agreements have different definitions for the payment and the agreements should always be checked by each employee. (Hjelt 2017.)

2.4 Effects of Covid-19 on the restaurant industry in Finland

The year 2020 has been extremely rough for the restaurant industry. Restaurants in Finland were closed from mid-March until the beginning of June and it affected the whole industry. On the 18th of March, Cooperative HOK-Elanto decided to close all its 82 restaurants in the metropolitan area. Sales in their grocery stores had risen 30-50% and all their

regular employees from the restaurants were transferred to the stores such as S-Market and Prisma. (Airola 2020.)

But what happened to the waiters, baristas and bartenders employed through agencies? According to Viinikka (2020), agency workers are more commonly the first employees to lose their jobs when there is a crisis. This happened in 2020 when coronavirus started to affect the restaurant industry. When other employees were kept working in restaurants for as long as it was allowed or moved to other tasks like in HOK-Elanto's case, agency workers were left without a job for several months. Many agency employees were working in Lapland during the season and their job contracts were ended suddenly. Many of these employees were foreigners as well and they faced an uncertain situation. (Viinikka 2020.)

The Finnish government decided that on June 1st restaurants could be opened again and opening hours would extend nationwide until 23.00. The number of customers allowed on the premises was half of the normal capacity and all customers had to have a seat inside. This rule did not apply to terraces. The importance of hygiene was highly emphasised when restaurants opened again. Restaurants were responsible to communicate with their customers about safe distances and every safety arrangement they were doing. (Strömberg 2020.)

During the pandemic, some of the employees working through agencies have been successfully employed in other industries than their regular ones. Agencies are still important employers in Finland and even though Covid-19 has affected companies in some industries negatively. Demand for restaurant industry workers has reduced because the industry is heavily restricted with emergency provisions. The professionals working in the agency industry are optimistic that when the situation calms down the agencies can answer the employment needs of user companies fast and flexibly. Agencies are ready to meet the workforce demands when the effects of the pandemic ease and the economy begins to rise again. Therefore, ensuring the success and growth of their user companies. (HPL 2021.)

3 Research methods

To gain the most valuable insights on this topic, I have chosen to use qualitative methods for this research. To outline the research methods, I have used *Business Research Methods* (2011) by Emma Bell and Alan Bryman. I believe that interviewing agency workers and letting them explain their experiences in detail was the best method of approaching this subject. By using quantitative methods, the results might have been more surface level and therefore not as extensive. I have interviewed four people with experiences of working through an agency to gain some insights into their opinions and experiences. I already had existing contacts in the field that I used to execute these interviews. All interviewees have worked in restaurants located in Helsinki and have experience from one to three years of working through an agency.

3.1 Qualitative research

Qualitative research is based on having a loosely defined research problem at the beginning of the research, and this is used to find out the variety of opinions concerning the phenomena. The definition of the concept is very important because it should not be too general. If it were too general, it would not provide a useful starting point for the research. On the contrary, if the definition is too narrow, the research might get stuck on one point and be too restricted. The concept can be revised during the collection of data and it can be narrowed. (Bell & Bryman 2011, 393.)

The process of qualitative research starts with a general research question which is then used to select relevant sites and subjects that can be used for the research. After the selection comes collecting relevant data and then the interpretation of that data. Based on this interpretation conceptual and theoretical work can begin. This can lead to the tighter specification of the research questions and collecting further data on this narrowed subject and further interpretation. Finally, when there are enough convincing and credible interpretations gathered on the topic they can be written up and made conclusions. (Bell & Bryman 2011, 390-392.)

Conducting interviews is one of the most common methods that can be used in qualitative research. The interviews are personal interviews with oral questions and answers. It is a conversation between the informant and the interviewer. One of the biggest benefits of conducting oral interviews is adaptability. The interviewees can be chosen so they have the most knowledge and experiences on the topic. This provides as many insights on the

topic as possible. It is also suggested to send the questions that will be asked during their interview to the participants beforehand, this way they can think about their answers before their interviews, and this will help to get as much information out of the interviews as possible. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2018.) This is something that I did before for every interview. The questions were sent to interviewees a few days before their interviews so that they were able to familiarise themselves with the questions and prepare some pointers for themselves. This could give better answers because the interviewees had thought about the topics beforehand and were ready with the answers.

3.2 Conducting interviews

When beginning to plan a research it is common to start with a general research area that interests the researcher. This can mean a personal interest or experience, organizational problems, research literature or theory. (Bell & Bryman 2011, 79.) For me, the curiosity for this topic started from my personal experiences in the field and the interest in other's experiences and comparing them to existing data.

Research questions should be formulated at an early phase of the research. They can help guide the literature search on the research and the collection and analysis of data. Clear research questions can also stop from getting off the subject. By formulating research questions early in the process, it will help guide the research to better results. Some qualitative researchers support an open approach with no research questions. This however can result in collecting masses of data without any clear point to observe. (Bell & Bryman 2011, 79.)

A research question is always formulated as a question with a question mark in the end. All research questions that occur while planning the research cannot be answered. There should be a clear focus for the research with coherent research questions. (Bell & Bryman 2011, 81.)

I was using the framework seen in figure 1 at the beginning of planning my thesis. These questions guided the process and helped me define the research questions. The "what, why and how?" framework presented by Watson (1994 in Bell & Bryman 2011, 84) consists of four segments. This framework can be used to craft a better research. These questions and the answers to them will guide the research and the decisions made during the research process (Bell & Bryman 2011, 83-84.)

What?	Why?
What puzzles/intrigues me? What do I want to know more about/understand better? What are my key research questions?	Why will this be of enough interest to others to be published as a thesis? Can the research be justified as a contribution to knowledge?
I am interested in finding out why people work through agencies and hearing their experiences from working through an agency. What are the positive and negative sides? Have they experienced any discrimination? Do they prefer working for one or more restaurants? Would they recommend working through an agency?	I believe that this will be valuable, since this topic is not discussed very openly and all comments I have found usually come from the agencies, so they might be biased and censored.
How- conceptually?	How- practically?
What models, concepts, and theories can I draw on /develop to answer my research questions? How can these be brought together into a basic conceptual framework to guide my investigation?	What investigative styles and techniques shall I use to apply my conceptual framework (both to gather material and analyse it)? How shall I gain and maintain access to information sources?
I believe that each employee will have positive and negative things to say about their experiences. I want to dig deeper into them and find out if there are any similarities between each interviewee and draw conclusions from there.	To gain the most in-depth answers I will interview people who have experiences working in the industry and I will be comparing the results to existing data

Figure 1. Framework for crafting research

Interviews using qualitative methods differ widely from ones using quantitative methods. Quantitative interviews are more structured and inflexible, focusing on specific issues. Whereas qualitative interviews tend to be more flexible and focus on interviewees' perspectives. It encourages interviewees' "rambling" since it can give insight into what they think is important and relevant on the topic. In qualitative research, the interviewees may be interviewed more than once, even several times. (Bell & Bryman 2011, 466-467.)

This research was conducted as a semi-structured interview. According to Bell & Bryman (2011, 467) in a semi-structured interview, the interviewer has a list of questions on the topics that the research covers and the interviewees have the freedom to express their

opinions however they want to. Questions not included in the list can be asked during the interviews if the interviewer picks up interesting points from what the interviewees have said (Bell & Bryman 2011, 467.) The list of questions used for the interviews can be found in appendix 1.

4 Results of the qualitative research

I have conducted four interviews with temporary agency workers and in this chapter, I will observe the findings from the interviews in detail. The interview data can be seen in table 1 with some background information on the interviewees.

As mentioned in table 1, all the interviewees are in their twenties. They are all students in University or other higher education or have just finished their bachelor's degree. None of the interviewees are studying the hospitality industry or other related industries. It can be assumed that they will not continue working in this field in the future after their graduation to the industries they have studied. The interviewees had worked for an agency from one to three years.

Table 1. Interview data tabulated

Interviewee	Date	Age	Agency	Area of work	Duration of the interview
A1	15.8.2020	22	X	Café/Bar/À la carte	23:26
A2	25.8.2020	23	Y	Bar	10:40
A3	1.9.2020	25	Y	Bar	24:30
A4	3.9.2020	22	X	Café	28:46

Two of the interviewees (A1, A3) have worked in several restaurants during their time working through an agency. The shortest period of working at one restaurant was one shift whereas the longest period continuously was four months. During that time, they had also worked singular shifts for other restaurants. The other interviewees (A2, A4) had only experiences from one restaurant. Both had worked for their employer restaurant for the third summer in a row at the time of the interviews.

All employees had only experiences from one agency, but two different agencies came up in the interviews. These agencies will not be disclosed in this thesis, but this is mentioned so that there can be a comparison between the employees of both agencies.

4.1 First impressions

I was interested in finding out how agency workers would shortly describe the term agency work. These first impressions can tell a lot about the opinions about the work these interviewees have and if their associations to it are positive or negative. I also wanted to find out how the interviewees had ended up working through an agency. Had they purposefully applied to work through one or were they just looking for a temporary job for example a summer job.

When asked about first associations with the term agency work the answers were similar from all interviewees. The interviewees brought up very quickly some positive and negative sides of the work. The word flexibility was mentioned by several interviewees. It is a very common aspect of agency work that is also present in the theories about the subject. It was brought up in the interviews that it can be especially beneficial for a student to have flexibility while working and studying at the same time.

A4: "There is a possibility to choose how much work I want to do and where. So, it is practical for the employee to have that much freedom and that might not be possible by working for the restaurant."

A2: "It is good that you can work here and there. While studying you can still work and don't have to have a contract with like 30 hours/week. Although now with corona it is a bit harder to get work because they cannot guarantee work for you."

A3: "As a student, it is a good arrangement but when working for a longer time I would rather work for the restaurant so I would get the work benefits that regulars have. The benefits are very poor, basically non-existent when working through an agency."

Some negative aspects about agency work were also mentioned. One interviewee had heard that agencies scam their employees, this might have come from former agency employees or just from people badmouthing agencies. It was also brought up that working through an agency brings an impractical intermediary for the employee.

When asked why they decided to work through an agency, interviewee A4 explains: "Well, I did not even realise that it was an agency – I was just looking for a summer job in the restaurant industry and it was a restaurant that seemed interesting. They were looking for employees for that specific restaurant and not just for an agency employee in general, so I applied there."

This has been a common answer with all the interviewees. None of the interviewees had realised that they were applying to work for an agency. In their mind, they had applied to work for a café or a restaurant and did not necessarily understand that they were going to be employed through an agency. It became clear for all of them during the application process at one point or another but none of them had applied to work for an agency consciously.

4.2 Positive experiences

I was interested in gathering insights into agency workers' positive and negative experiences from working for an agency. This chapter will discuss the results from the interviews considering the positive experiences of the interviewees. I will concentrate on the overall opinions on agency work and what the interviewees think of the agency as an employer as well as their experiences with issues such as treatment of agency employees and orientation.

Some positive aspects repeated from the first impressions such as the flexible nature of the work. This can benefit people who do not want to or cannot be restricted by their jobs such as students and summer workers. It was also mentioned that it is easy to return to work after a longer period of not working for example only working for summers. The interviewees were also satisfied with the opportunities they have gotten through the job. It is possible to work for different restaurants and choose when and how they want to work. Possibility to try different styled restaurants and different ways of serving such as á la carte, café, bar, terrace, or nightclub. It was also mentioned that by working at several restaurants, the employees get to meet new people as well and get to know them.

A1: "Good sides in agency work is flexibility. That there is a possibility to affect where and when the employee wants to work if one does not have a regular spot. And the possibility to try new places and different aspects of the industry. Like I have gotten to work at fine dining, cafés, night clubs and done regular bar shifts. The work allows you to experience the restaurant world widely and shows you what the industry has to offer."

The interviews revealed that these agency workers are fairly satisfied with their employer agencies. They stated that communication with the agency works well and the agency checks up on the employees occasionally. Even during the spring of 2020 when Covid-19 had taken most agency workers' jobs, interviewee A3 remembers the agency calling them

and offering a job at a warehouse. And even though they did not take the job the agency kept sending them encouraging messages.

A2: "Positive experiences from the agency would be that they are fast at answering messages and emails if one needs to change hours or something else. They usually answer during that same day, so they are fast at responding and communication works well."

Two of the interviewees were satisfied with the application process, explaining that it was fun and fast and the forming and signing of the employment contract was simple as well. Both employees mentioning the application process worked for the same agency. It can be assumed that this agency's application process was memorable for the applicants. During the interviews it was expressed from several interviewees that help is always available from the agency and regular inquiries come from the agencies as well to ensure that their employees have enough shifts and that they are doing well. The agency also offers to look for more shifts if the employee is unsatisfied with the amount they are currently getting. The interviewees state that normally it is easy to get shifts through the agency.

A4: "The recruitment process was nice and fast-paced. Like when I applied, I got a video interview the next day. It worked effortlessly – and was handled well. – They have sometimes called and checked on my plans for working in the future and offered more shifts from other restaurants if I were not getting enough shifts from the restaurant I was currently working for."

Agency workers are treated the same as regulars according to interviewee A1. They have never experienced being treated differently from other employees and have always been invited to recreational days at the restaurant they have worked at as a regular agency employee. The treatment of agency workers may differ between restaurants and in ones where there are lots of extras that change frequently it may reflect more from the regulars than at other places. Interviewee A3 explains that usually, employees are not even aware that who exactly is an agency worker and who is a regular so there usually is not any division between the employees. These opinions differ from the theory I had collected on the topic. The theory suggested that there can be prejudices towards agency employees and that agency employees might feel like outsiders in the work community.

When I asked the interviewees if they had ever experienced or encountered discrimination from other employees because they are agency workers, I got the same answer from all of them. Never. This however does not necessarily mean that there is no discrimination towards agency employees in the restaurant industry. It might just be that the employees I

interviewed have all been very lucky to work in restaurants and with people that value their work and do not discriminate against agency workers.

The quality and depth of orientation usually depend on the restaurant according to interviewee A1. When starting as a regular agency employee at a new restaurant the orientation is usually detailed. Help is always available if needed. Some of the restaurants have a checklist that is used to go through the orientation. Fine dining orientation is the most detailed according to interviewee A1. Some restaurants have shifts that are dedicated to orientation. Interviewee A3 believes that the quality of orientation may differ between restaurants, but they have gotten a good orientation at all the places they have worked at.

A4: "I think the quality of orientation depends on if the employee is doing extra shifts or coming there as a regular. Like when I started it was known that I was coming to work for the whole summer and the orientation process is a bit different from just doing one shift at the restaurant – when the orientation might be poorer. – The thing is that customers do not know if you are a regular or not so they might ask you something like where the toilets are, and you cannot just reply that you do not know. – It should also be instructed for every new employee whom you can ask for relevant information on different topics."

4.3 Negative experiences

In some contexts, agency work has negative associations and a bad reputation. As mentioned in chapter 4.1 before working as an agency worker themselves one of the interviewees had thought that agencies scam their employees. The theory suggested that the unreliable nature of agency work is one of the biggest challenges for agency workers. This however did not come up during the interviews. It could mean that this is not such an issue for students, or the interviewees had been lucky or satisfied with the amount of work they were getting. Instead, issues that came up had to do with work benefits, the orientation of new employees and changes in shifts.

There is a flipside to meeting new people and experiencing the differences of the restaurant industry. Interviewee A1 explains that it can be stressful to change restaurants frequently since every place has differences in their own practices, so the employee must learn the ropes of a new restaurant repeatedly. Especially the first shift in a new restaurant is usually spent with the mindset of: "What is this? How does it work? How do you do things here?" Familiarising oneself with the new restaurant can take a few shifts so it can be exhausting to work at several different locations.

The interviewees have had problems with shift cancellations. Two of them mention cancellations due to bad weather and this is understandable since they have both worked at terrace shifts. Interviewee A1 had no problem with these cancellations since they have always gotten covering shifts for the cancelled ones. On the contrary, interviewee A3 explained that sometimes the replacement shifts can come at an hour's notice and might be very far away. They expressed frustration on having to travel long distances just to get the salary for the day. Interviewee A3 has had some problems with salary payment as well: "My salary has been paid wrong to me like five times when I have checked it."

Another issue came up in shift planning as well. Interviewee A4 told me that their shifts had been changed slightly in isolated incidences. These had to do with quickly changed opening hours. Interviewee A4 has experienced this not once, but twice in the same restaurant. The first incident happened in 2019 when Finland was competing for the Ice Hockey World Championship and the employer had informed the day before that if Finland wins the Championship the opening hours would be extended by two hours. The employees had to work three hours overtime overall because of this sudden change in opening hours. Another incident happened in the summer of 2020 when the restaurant opening hours were changed and there were existing shifts marked in the roster already and the employees' hours were affected. According to interviewee A4, these hours were never compensated for.

The agency being an unnecessary intermediary has come up in other questions as well and it came up again when I was asking about negative experiences of agency work. It can be very impractical for long time employees working for the same restaurant and agreeing of shifts with this restaurant. Interviewee A4 told me that they sometimes forget to inform the agency that they already have an agreement on the continuation of their employment with the employer restaurant and that they often have to repeat themselves to several employees at the agency.

A4: "Because of the intermediary, if there are any problems with the restaurant you do not always have the energy to go through the intermediary, but you cannot handle the issue with the restaurant either because they are not your employer officially. It adds an extra step if you have any problems you have to contact the agency. You might not want to go through all the trouble."

The interviewees mention poor benefits or lack of them overall as a negative aspect of agency work. It is characterised as frustrating to be doing the same job as regulars but not

getting the same job benefits. This challenge was also mentioned in the theory, but it was not further explained by the interviewees that what kind of benefits they would specifically want to have.

The sick payment was also mentioned by several interviewees. Some had not had any problems with it, but others felt that how to get the payment was somewhat a mystery. Interviewee A3 explained that their employer agency has a policy with sick leave where the employee must have worked for a certain number of hours in the last 14 days to get the payment. This is not always easy for agency workers because the hours are not guaranteed. This information has not been disclosed by the agency clearly either, this information came as hearsay as well since interviewee A3 has not had any sick leave themselves during their time working for the agency.

A4: "It may just be laziness, but I have felt that if I needed to take sick leave, I would not know how it works. I have never had sick leave and might have gone to work a bit sick as well because I do not know how it works. – It would make handling these things easier if I were employed by the restaurant."

When asked about the treatment of agency workers at restaurants interviewee A2 answered that they have always been treated fairly but they have noticed that some extras have not been treated the same. The extra agency employees are frequently given unwanted tasks, and this is usually because the products and registers differ between restaurants, so it is easier for the restaurant's regulars and regular agency workers to be doing the sales. According to interviewee A4 during Covid-19 the regular employees at the restaurant were given masks for free from the employer, but the agency workers were not given this same chance even though they work at the same restaurant regularly just like the other employees. The agency employees were not given masks from the agency either.

Interviewee A2 has noticed that the orientation to a new place is very short and rushed. According to them, this is usually done by another employee and not a superior. Interviewee A2 has themselves shown new agency workers around the restaurant and shown them the ropes. Usually, this consists of shortly introducing to the place and showing the register quickly but otherwise, it is common that the extras are just given tasks such as collecting dishes and other menial chores. The amount of the orientation differs if the employee is to become a regular at the restaurant. Then the orientation is usually more detailed according to interviewee A2. Interviewee A1 has experienced being moved from

one restaurant to another in a restaurant complex with multiple restaurants. In these situations, there usually is no time for orientation so employees might have to learn the ropes by themselves.

4.4 Opinions on working for one or several restaurants

At the beginning of planning my research, I was intrigued by the two very distinct ways of working through an agency. Meaning that there are agency workers that want to work as a regular agency worker for just one restaurant or others that take shifts from several different restaurants. I was successful at finding interviewees who had worked in both ways. I wanted to keep this question in the research and address it in my thesis since it might help possible new employees to find and understand their preferred style of working.

All interviewees have worked as regular agency workers for one or more restaurants, but two of them also had experiences of working for several restaurants at the same time and not having the “home” restaurant at one point of their working history at an agency. I wanted to find out which way of working the interviewees preferred themselves and which one they would recommend.

A1: “I like that I have been able to work at the same place for a longer time, it has become somewhat a home for me. I enjoy seeing the same people and being able to get deeper friendships with my colleagues, learning the ropes of the restaurant and knowing how everything works. It can be tough if the workplace changes a lot because you always have to learn everything from the beginning which can be exhausting in a long run. – But I also enjoy working at other restaurants to gain different experiences. – It enriches your knowledge to be able to work in several places.”

Interviewee A1 continues to express that where they enjoy working at new restaurants and gaining new experience, it can get very exhausting in a long run. This way of working would fit the most extroverted people in their mind. On the contrary, only working at one restaurant can get boring for people that are variety seeking.

Interviewee A3 has also worked for several restaurants during their time working through the agency and they had similar opinions: “In a longer run it is nice to work for the same restaurant, like for the summer. But when studies start it is easier not to commit to any specific restaurant. – Some easy shifts like breakfast shifts are fine but I would rather work at the same place. Then again if you work for a longer time at the same place you might

get bored and especially if it is not your own field you might not have the motivation to work for any other reason than the money. Honestly saying it gets kind of forced when everything is the same all the time. But if you work at different places all the time you might get the feeling that you do not know what you are supposed to do. It requires a lot of energy to go to a new restaurant because you need to ask instructions all the time and it just feels like you are bad at everything and that is not fun either.”

It is the familiarity of working for the same restaurant that attracts the interviewees to this style of employment. Interviewee A2 has worked for the same restaurant for three summers and they never liked the idea of working for several restaurants: “I prefer working at the same restaurant. Because I know the people and the tasks and how everything works and how it is done well. Things work more smoothly. If I were to hop from one place to another the working styles might mix up and the food and drinks differ between restaurants. The registers work differently, and it takes time to understand how it works. It is just easier to stay at the same restaurant.”

Interviewee A4 prefers working for the same restaurant as well but has started losing their interest in the work after working at the same place for almost three years: “I would be interested in having another regular spot because I have worked at the same place for so long it is starting to feel like there are no challenges. – It would be fun to work somewhere else to challenge myself, but especially in the beginning, it is good to work at the same place to improve your skills and get some friends. It is nice to be in a good work community when you know the people you work with. It affects job satisfaction. I have thought about working elsewhere but also that if I were to change my workplace I would rather work on my own field.”

The opinions were quite similar. It was preferred by all interviewees to have one restaurant where they would work as a regular, but trying new restaurants was also encouraged by them. The interviewees point out a few downsides of working for one restaurant only. In their opinion, it can become repetitive, and the work will not challenge the employee as much as in the beginning. Then again, it was also pointed out that it can be frustrating to hop from one restaurant to another and not have a “home” restaurant. There are so many variables when changing a restaurant frequently. It is good to have a familiar place to return to.

4.5 Interviewees' recommendations

In this chapter, I will discuss some recommendations the interviewees had for the agencies and people interested in working through an agency. The recommendations will include ideas and proposals the interviewees have thought of to improve the agency industry and the agencies practices as well as improvement ideas for the restaurants' management when training new employees. I wanted to find out if the interviewees would recommend agency work for future employees and to whom the interviewees would recommend it.

All the interviewees expressed that they would continue working through an agency in the future as well. Interviewee A1 explains that it is a safe choice for the summers between studies to continue working for the same restaurant they have worked for in the past as well. Interviewee A3 is planning on working through an agency in their own field as well: "I have applied for another agency in my own field – to get some extra shifts from there as well. – I want to get a regular contract on my field in the future but for the start, I might have to work through an agency."

Some improvements the interviewees suggested for the agencies' practices were related to the orientation of new employees and communication between each party. It is expressed that the agency should put more effort into organising some orientation or training days to teach the employees some basic tasks in their new jobs. The agency should be encouraging new employees to attend them as well. Interviewee A1 explains that something like this was organised but they had to miss the day. They would suggest organising these days more often so every new employee could attend one and get the information they needed. Interviewee A2 thinks that every new employee at a restaurant should arrive half an hour before the start of their shift to get more time to familiarise themselves with the restaurant's practices and to get a better orientation to the place. Therefore, at the beginning of their shift, they would already have an idea of what they are supposed to do there.

Interviewee A3 suggests that agencies should communicate more on sick leave and what employees should do to get the sick payment since it has been somewhat a mystery to them and their colleagues as well. Shift planning and more importantly shift cancellations were also something that interviewee A3 thinks that agencies should communicate better about with their employees. Covering shifts for the cancelled ones should be organised better so that employees would not lose their salaries for the day. These are some small

improvements that the interviewees had in mind and that would make the employee's work experience easier than it is right now.

Every interviewee would recommend working through an agency, especially for students. They would consider working through an agency a great way to get to know the restaurant industry and to get to know different restaurants and working styles in the industry. There are possibilities for various contracts that will fit different living stages and the possibilities are endless. In interviewee A4's opinion, agency employment is an easy way to get into the restaurant industry and there is always the possibility to get employed by the restaurant in the future.

5 Discussion

The objective of this thesis was to gather insights into agency workers experiences and comparing them to existing data. This was achieved by interviewing four agency workers who explained their experiences and provided great insights for this research. I believe that by using qualitative methods I was able to get the most in-depth answers from the interviewees. I wanted to examine the topic from a new perspective and gain insights into the interviewees' personal experiences and thoughts on the topic. I believe that the insights from these interviews will help people to understand the employees' experiences of working for an agency.

The interviews suggested that agency workers might not knowingly apply to work through an agency but end up there after searching for a job in the industry. The theory would support this conclusion since in the restaurant industry it is very common to be working through an agency. Young adults looking for a part-time job or students looking for summer jobs in the restaurant industry can easily find themselves working through an agency even if they did not purposely apply to work for one. The restaurant industry's employment is heavily reliant on the agency industry.

The positive experiences of the interviewees were mostly related to the possibilities and opportunities that the flexible nature of agency work provides for the employees. The interviewees had been treated well in the restaurants and they had not been discriminated against. Even though the interviewees had not experienced bad treatment themselves it was noted that extra agency workers have been treated somewhat differently from regular agency workers at the same restaurant. The opinions of the interviewees are supported by the theory since it suggested that there are some prejudices towards agency employees and that they might not feel like a part of the work community. Especially when working as an extra agency employee at several restaurants when it can become exhausting for the employee having to get to know new colleagues continuously. The unreliability of working through an agency was found to be a challenge facing many agency workers according to the theory. This unreliability has been experienced by the interviewees by sudden changes and cancellations in shifts. This should not be feasible without the employee's consent since it is mentioned in the collective agreement.

Despite their negative experiences the interviewees would still recommend working through an agency. They believe that agency work would fit a student, or anyone interested in working in the restaurant industry and wanting to find out the versatility of the industry. The interviewees preferred having a contract as a regular agency employee at one

restaurant but taking some shifts from other restaurants was highly recommended as well. This way of working would fit people who like variability in their work and are not afraid of new challenges. The preference of the working style is personal for everyone and some employees might not have a choice between them since work is not always guaranteed as suggested by the theory and interviews.

The poor quality of the orientation of new employees at a restaurant was mentioned in the theory and has carried through the interviews and development ideas for the agency industry. It was proposed that the agency could invest more in the training of their new employees by organising orientation days. A rule of new employees arriving early to their first shifts at a new restaurant was also proposed. This would make the orientation of the new employee easier.

It can be concluded from the results of the interviews that the experiences of the interviewees are mostly positive. I believe that their recommendations are valid, and they can be trusted since all four would still recommend agency work despite the challenges and negative experiences they have faced. Most of the negative experiences seem to be minor inconveniences but they still affect the job satisfaction of the employees. Nevertheless, the interviewees seem overall satisfied with their experiences of working through an agency.

To develop this research further the group of interviewees could be broader. The agency workers interviewed could be from different cities, different ages, different life situations or different backgrounds. The objective of the research could be tighter only concentrating on topics such as discrimination of agency employees or development ideas for the agency industry.

5.1 Trustworthiness of the research

Since reliability and validity are used in quantitative research and are not relevant to qualitative research there have been several stances taken to define these concepts for qualitative research (Bell & Bryman 2011, 394-395.) One of the concepts has been proposed by Yardley (2000, in Bell & Bryman 2011, 399) and it consists of four criteria. These are sensitivity to context; commitment and rigour; transparency and coherence; impact and importance. Sensitivity to context means sensitivity to the social settings where the research is conducted and beyond those settings to potentially related theoretical positions

and ethical matters. Commitment and rigour indicate a dedication to the research by having extensive knowledge on the topic, collecting detailed data and thorough analysis. Transparency and coherence refer to having an unbiased view of the clearly specified research methods and arguments. Impact and importance mean the importance of the research's impact on the existing theory on the topic, the community that the research is based on. (Bell & Bryman 2011, 399.)

All interviews were conducted in Finnish since all the interviewees speak Finnish fluently. The answers have been later translated to English to reflect on them for this thesis. This might affect the trustworthiness of the research since the opinions cannot be referred to in their original language. I believe that in reflecting on the results of the interviews I managed to stay unbiased despite my own opinions and experiences in the industry.

I had planned on interviewing 5-8 people for this thesis. After the fourth interview, I had found so many similarities in the interviewees' answers that I believed that saturation had been reached and I was satisfied with the insights I had gathered. The results from these interviews do not represent all agency employees, they are the experiences and opinions of these interviewees and they happen to be mostly positive.

5.2 Evaluating the thesis process

At the beginning of the process, I decided to go with a topic I had existing knowledge about. I have worked through an agency for over two years now and I was interested in understanding the experiences of other employees in the industry. I wanted to find out how people end up working for agencies and what aspects of the work do they prefer.

I had never used qualitative research methods in any of my studies before. I had never interviewed anyone before either. It was a process to understand the secrets of the method at first, I believe that I did a decent job. Finding interviewees was not hard for me since I already had contacts in the industry. The interviews went well, and I got great answers to all my research questions. I truly believe that I found interesting insights about the world of agency work.

I had chosen to do the interviews first and find the theory after them. Later in the research, I realised that not doing some theoretical research beforehand was a huge mistake, but it was already too late. The interviews directed my thesis from then on. Finding theory and

researches based on the interviews was much harder. If it was possible to begin the thesis process from the beginning, I would do things differently and spend more time on planning the thesis.

I am satisfied with the results of the thesis. I believe that the experiences I gathered from the interviews are very interesting and relevant. I can relate to some of them as well and I believe that other agency workers would as well. I admit that the research problem might be too widely defined, but in a way that was my intention in trying to represent agency workers experiences altogether. The thesis process took longer than I had expected, and it was delayed, but overall, I am pleased with the process and the results. I believe that there can always be improvements, but I am satisfied with what I have done for this thesis.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Questions for the interviews

Taustakysymykset:

- Ikä
- Kuinka kauan olet työskennellyt vuokratyöfirmalle
- Kuinka monelle vuokratyöfirmalle olet työskennellyt
- Mitä alaa opiskelet/ Minkä alan tutkinto sinulta löytyy?
- Työskenteletkö pääosin yhdessä ravintolassa, vai otatko vuoroja useasta ravintolasta
- Työskenteletkö kahvilassa, baarissa, ravintolassa?

- Millaisia ajatuksia vuokratyö herättää sinussa?
- Miksi päädyit valitsemaan vuokratyön?
- Mikä on pisin työpäiväsi samassa ravintolassa? Entä lyhin?
- Mitä hyviä puolia vuokratyössä on? Entä huonoja?
- Millaisia kokemuksia sinulla on vuokratyöfirmoista työnantajana? Positiivisia ja negatiivisia
- Millaisiin ongelmakohtiin olet törmännyt vuokratyöfirmalle työskennellessä?
- Millaisen perehdytyksen uusi vuokratyöntekijä saa ravintolassa?
- Kohdellaanko vuokratyöntekijöitä mielestäsi tasa-arvoisesti ravintoloissa muihin työntekijöihin verrattuna?
- Oletko kokenut ravintoloissa syrjintää vuokratyöntekijöitä kohtaan?
- Onko sinulle miellyttävämpää työskennellä samassa ravintolassa, vai nautitko vaihtelevuudesta eri ravintoloissa? Miksi?
- Aiotko työskennellä vuokratyöfirman kautta myös tulevaisuudessa? Miksi/ Miksi et?
- Millaisia kehitysehdotuksia sinulla on vuokratyön ravintola-alalla?
- Suositteletko vuokratyötä muille? Kenelle?