



PARENTS' NON-STANDARD WORK SCHEDULES MAKE ADEQUATE CHILDREARING DIFFICULT

Reforming Labor Market Practices Can Improve Children's Cognitive and Behavioral Outcomes

BY **LEILA MORSY** AND **RICHARD ROTHSTEIN**

Introduction and key findings

Recent developments in employment practices have increased the prevalence of non-standard work schedules—non-daytime shifts in which most hours do not fall between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m., when shifts rotate, or when schedules vary weekly or otherwise. For example, computer software now enables retail, restaurant, service, and other firms to predict hourly customer demand and delivery schedules with precision, encouraging employers to create “just-in-time” schedules in which workers are called in or sent home on short notice.¹ By preventing many parents from adequately caring for their children, such practices adversely affect child and adolescent development.

This issue brief examines evidence on the prevalence of unpredictable and non-standard work schedules, and on how such schedules impair children's development. It concludes by proposing policy solutions. Key findings include:

- Non-standard schedules are more common among black workers and less-educated workers, and also among mothers who are low-income, younger, and have spent more years as single parents.

- Young children and adolescents of parents working unpredictable schedules or outside standard daytime working hours are more likely to have inferior cognitive and behavioral outcomes.
 - Toddlers whose mothers work non-standard hours demonstrate worse sensory perception, memory, learning, problem solving, verbal communication, and expressive language.
 - Preschoolers whose mothers work non-standard hours exhibit more negative behavior (depression, anxiety, withdrawal, aggression).
 - Parents' variable schedules require irregular family mealtimes and child bedtimes that interfere with children's healthy development. For young children, mothers with non-standard schedules must make inconsistent and poorer quality child care arrangements.
 - Parents with non-standard schedules can engage in fewer pre-academic activities with children, such as reading books, telling stories, and practicing reading, writing, or math skills.
 - Parents with non-standard hours are more tired, anxious, irritable, and stressed, making children's delinquency, aggression, and other negative behaviors more likely.
- Policy changes should create disincentives to schedule work in ways that impede employees' ability to care for their children.
 - For instance, legislation should require premiums for work performed beyond eight hours after the first working hour of the day or outside typical daytime hours, and provide predictable scheduling and pay, adequate rest between shifts, and access to adequate hours.

Prevalence of non-standard and unpredictable schedules

African American workers are typically assigned more non-standard work schedules. Focusing on adults at the ages when they are likely to be raising children, at age 29 blacks are about 60 percent more likely to work a non-daytime schedule than whites and Asians, and about 24 percent more likely to have non-standard schedules of all kinds, including non-daytime, rotating shift, or variable schedules. Ten years later, at age 39, the differences persist: Blacks are about 55 percent more likely to be assigned non-daytime shifts than whites and Asians, and about 20 percent more likely to work non-standard schedules of all kinds.²

TABLE 1

Share of workers (age 39) who work non-standard schedules, by educational attainment (percent of attainment group)

	Less than H.S.	H.S.	Some college	College or more
<i>Working variable, non-daytime, or other non-standard schedule</i>	23%	24%	18%	19%
<i>Working non-daytime schedule</i>	17	15	10	5

Source: Presser and Ward (2011),^[3] charts 4, 5

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Table 1 shows that less-educated workers are more likely to work non-standard schedules. For instance, college-educated parents have non-daytime shifts one-third as often as parents with high school degrees or less. Mothers who are low-income, younger, and have spent more years as single parents are also more likely to have non-standard schedules.⁴

Table 2 shows shares of hourly workers, particularly working parents, who receive little advance notice of weekly hours, making their earnings unpredictable. Of hourly workers, about half of blacks, half of those with low wages, and one-third of mothers with pre-teen children get one week or less notice of their weekly schedules. Most don't receive the same number of weekly hours; fluctuation is substantial. Sixty-nine percent of hourly paid working mothers of pre-teens report weekly fluctuations in hours.

TABLE 2

Advance notice given to hourly employees, childrearing years (age 26-32)

Notice of schedule (percent receiving notice of):

	≤ 1 week	≤ 2 weeks	≤ 4 weeks	Share of hourly workers whose weekly hours vary (percent)
<i>All hourly employees</i>	41%	55%	61%	74%
<i>Women</i>	34	48	57	70
<i>White</i>	39	51	58	74
<i>Black</i>	49	65	69	73
<i>Mothers of children < 13 years of age</i>	32	44	51	69
<i>Women in part-time jobs</i>	41	58	68	81
<i>Low-wage (<\$15/hr) part-time workers</i>	49	67	76	83
<i>Janitors and housekeepers</i>	40	54	60	66
<i>Food service workers</i>	64	81	84	90
<i>Retail workers</i>	50	78	89	87
<i>Home care workers</i>	55	65	67	71

Source: Lambert, Fugiel, and Henly (2014), tables 3, 5, 12, 13;^[5] Fugiel (2015)^[6]

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Scheduling's impact on children

These differences in work schedules have consequences for children. Toddlers whose mothers work non-standard hours, taking account of other potential factors, demonstrate worse sensory perception, memory, learning, problem solving, verbal communication, and expressive language.⁷ Preschoolers whose mothers work non-standard schedules lose from 10 to 12 percentile points from the average in a normal distribution of negative behavior (depression, anxiety, withdrawal, aggression).⁸ Patterns established this early in life are difficult to reverse, and have a strong influence on adolescent and adult outcomes.

Thirteen- and 14-year-olds whose parents work nights are more likely to engage in risky behavior (smoking, alcohol use, delinquency, sexual activity), and are more likely to be depressed.⁹

Parents' variable schedules require irregular family mealtimes and child bedtimes that interfere with children's healthy development.¹⁰ For young children, mothers with non-standard schedules must make inconsistent and poorer quality child care arrangements;¹¹ because they cannot enroll children in high-quality centers that require predictable drop-off and pick-up times, they make last-minute arrangements with friends or relatives. In many states, parents working irregular and variable schedules lose eligibility for child care subsidies.¹²

Parents with non-standard schedules can engage in fewer pre-academic activities with children, such as reading books, telling stories, and practicing reading, writing, or math skills.¹³ Fathers with non-standard schedules are less close to their children. Of particular importance for parents of adolescents, those working nights can't supervise critical after-school time.¹⁴ Parents with non-standard hours are more tired, anxious, irritable, and stressed, making children's delinquency, aggression, and other negative behaviors more likely.¹⁵

Variable part-time schedules prevent parents from securing second jobs for added income to support children's welfare. They also prevent parents from enrolling in school themselves to provide better intellectual environments and models of educational aspiration for their children.¹⁶

Policy implications

Although employer demands for evening and night-time work will continue, reforms should create disincentives to schedule work that impedes employees' ability to provide stable home lives for children. Legislation should require premiums for work performed beyond eight hours after the first working hour of the day or outside typical daytime hours. Workers required to stay beyond their regularly scheduled shifts should receive overtime premiums, even if they have not yet worked eight hours in the day or 40 hours in the week. A bill has been introduced in Congress to require employers to post schedules at least two weeks in advance and to provide call-in pay—a pay guarantee for workers called in and then sent home early.¹⁷ In 2015, 10 states and a growing number of municipalities have introduced bills to address unpredictable scheduling, with many including provisions requiring three weeks advance notice, 11 hours of rest between shifts, access to adequate hours, and predictability pay to compensate employees for last-minute schedule changes.¹⁸

“Just-in-time” assignments increase employee absenteeism and turnover.¹⁹ If reforms reduced these, costs to employers of greater regulation might decrease. Productivity could improve if employers invested in training now made cost-effective by higher compensation.

Although differences—by race and social class—in parents' non-standard schedules may seem small, they are compounded by other differences in social and economic conditions that predict worse outcomes for disadvantaged children and adolescents. Narrowing gaps in cognitive and behavioral outcomes requires coordinating labor market reforms with improvements in many other social and economic conditions that disadvantage youths.

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18. New scheduling legislation has been introduced in 2015 in California, Connecticut, Illinois, Indiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Jersey, New York, and Oregon. A growing number of municipalities are expected to introduce legislation in the coming months, including Albuquerque, New Mexico; Minneapolis, Minnesota; and Washington, D.C.

Information provided by Carrie Gleason, director of the Fair Workweek Initiative at the Center for Popular Democracy, June 19, 2015. See Fair Workweek Initiative, “[Legislative Update](#),” May 21, 2015; and CLASP, “[A National Repository of Resources on Job Scheduling Policy](#),” May 4, 2015.

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