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Work Schedule Flexibility in Hourly Jobs:
Unanticipated Consequences and Promising Directions[1]

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Abstract

Researchers, policy advocates, and employers in the United States (U.S.) have intensified efforts to promote flexibility policies that are designed to provide workers greater influence over the timing and location of their work. Most flexibility initiatives have the goal of loosening up rigid job schedules, an attempt to facilitate work-life balance and level the playing field for women in male-dominated professional jobs. Yet broad segments of hourly jobs are already "loose," characterized by fluctuating rather than rigid schedules and too few rather than too many work hours. In this paper, we draw on national U.S. Census data and findings from three comparative case studies of low-level hourly jobs across several industries to identify conditions of work in the U.S. that complicate the implementation of work schedule flexibility in hourly jobs. We begin by reviewing key business and policy conditions that influence scheduling practices in low-level hourly jobs. We then consider realities of low-level hourly jobs that can impede the implementation of conventional forms of schedule flexibility, at times creating unintended negative consequences for workers and coworkers. We conclude by identifying private and public tools for delivering meaningful flexibility to jobs with scarce and fluctuating work hours.

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Flexibility is perhaps the most highly touted work-life benefit in the United States (U.S.). Researchers, policy advocates and employers have intensified efforts to promote flexibility on the job by supporting fundamental changes to the organization of work that will provide workers with greater influence into "when, where, and for how long [they] engage in work-related tasks" (Hill, Grzywacz, Allen, et al., 2008, p.152). Research suggests there is good reason to do so. Flexibility has been shown to improve workers' ability to reconcile work and personal responsibilities, reduce stress, and improve worker health and well-being (Fenwick & Tausig, 2005; Kossek, Lautsch, & Eaton, 2005; Pabayo, Critchley, & Bambra, 2010).

As with many other employment policies in the U.S., however, most work-life benefits are implemented at the discretion of employers rather than by requirement of law or in conjunction with collective bargaining agreements. Not surprisingly, then, flexibility is unequally distributed across the U.S. workforce, with low-level hourly workers having less access to flexibility options than their professional and managerial counterparts (Golden, 2005; Swanberg, Pitt-Catsouphes, & Drescher-Burke, 2005). This is especially troubling since the majority of both men (55.9 percent) and women (60.7) in the wage and salary workforce are paid by the hour (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010a). Fortunately, policymakers, advocacy groups, and researchers are becoming increasingly interested in developing and promoting flexibility options for U.S. workers in hourly jobs (see Levin-Epstein [Center for Law and Social Policy], 2006; Corporate Voices for Working Families, 2009; Council of Economic Advisors, 2010; Families & Work Institute, 2010; Boushey, Moughari, Sattelmeyer & Waller [The Mobility Agenda], 2008; Workplace Flexibility 2010, 2009). As these initiatives proceed, it will be important that they reflect the range of work conditions found in hourly jobs, including low-wage jobs in service industries.

Most flexibility options currently included in public discourse are designed to loosen up rigid job structures. For example, the policy brief prepared by the Council of Economic Advisors (2010) for the recent “Flexibility Summit” held by the Obama administration advocates that employers implement policies that allow workers to work reduced hours (i.e., part-time), to vary start and end times, and to work at home. The goal of reducing rigidity reflects the origins of worker-centered flexibility as a means to “level the playing field” for women in male-dominated managerial and professional jobs characterized by long and rigid hours of work. When hourly jobs share these qualities, flexibility options targeted at reducing job rigidity make sense, and research indicates that they are welcomed by workers (Corporate Voices for Working Families, 2009).

Not all hourly jobs are characterized, however, by inflexibility that takes the form of long, rigid hours of work. Broad segments of today’s low-level hourly jobs are already loose, with fluctuating rather than rigid work hours, too few rather than too many hours, and place-bound job duties (e.g., cooking, serving, cleaning) that preclude working anywhere but at the work site (Appelbaum, Bernhardt, & Murnane, 2003; Appelbaum & Schmitt, 2009; Haley-Lock, forthcoming; Lambert, forthcoming; Williams, 2006). Existing flexibility options may therefore not map well onto hourly jobs with these qualities and, as we explain below, may in certain instances actually disadvantage workers by undermining their ability to earn an adequate living. As we move forward in the quest for better flexibility practices and policies, it is critical that we broaden the range of flexibility options so that efforts benefit all workers, including (and especially) the most vulnerable.

In this article, we draw on both national U.S. Census data and findings from comparative case studies of low-level hourly jobs (in retail, hospitality, transportation, financial services, and restaurants) to identify conditions of work in the U.S. that complicate the implementation of two conventional forms of work schedule flexibility: working reduced hours and varying start and end times. We begin by providing an overview of business and policy conditions that shape scheduling practices in hourly jobs, focusing primarily, though not exclusively, on the U.S. We then consider realities of low-level hourly jobs that can complicate the implementation of both forms of schedule flexibility and how each can act to disadvantage workers and their coworkers under certain circumstances. In the discussion section, we build on this analysis to identify new directions for improving scheduling practices in jobs with fluctuating and scarce work hours that hold the potential to deliver meaningful flexibility to workers in hourly jobs.

The Business and Policy Contexts of Low-Level Hourly Jobs in the U.S.

Job conditions on the frontlines of firms are driven by more than the nature of the work to be performed (Appelbaum, Bosch, Gautie, et al., 2009; Baron & Bielby, 1980; Kalleberg, 2009; Meyers & Gornick, 2009; Osterman, 1999). Government protections and policies and firms' business strategies both play substantial roles in determining the nature of work in different types of jobs and the ability of workers to reconcile employment and personal responsibilities. The literature is replete with evidence that broad changes in the economy (the shift from manufacturing to services, for example), declines in unionization, the spread of business strategies emphasizing cost containment, and loosening of government labor standards are contributing to a growing precariousness in employment, both in the U.S. and globally (Hacker, 2006; Kalleberg, 2009). These larger forces are reflected in specific public policies (or the lack thereof) and employer practices that – in combination – shape scheduling practices in low-level hourly jobs.

The Business Context for Scheduling in Low-Level Hourly Jobs

There is growing recognition that the extent to which variation in the number and timing of work hours improves or undermines the well-being of workers and their families depends on who controls the variation. Recent research seeks to distinguish employer-driven flexibility, in which work hour variations are an outcome of employer requirements, versus employee-driven flexibility, in which variations are the result of employee preferences. Overall, research suggests that variations in work hours are more commonly employer-driven than employee-driven, especially in low-level jobs (Henly, Shaefer, & Waxman, 2006; Moss, Salzman & Tilly, 2005; Zeytinoglu, Cooke & Mann, 2009).

As conceptually appealing as it is to locate the source of work hour fluctuations within employers or employees, the distinction between the two is not always clear cut. For example, when one sales associate calls off work and a manager calls in another associate who would like to work additional hours, is this variation in the latter's schedule employee- or employer-driven? Or when housekeepers switch schedules with one another because their supervisor scheduled one of them at a time she could not work, is the flexibility that results from permitting the switch to occur a form of employee- or employer-driven flexibility? In the real world, the choices available to both frontline managers and workers are better conceived of as constrained and contingent rather than free (Bourgeois, 1984; Eisenhardt & Zbaracki, 1992). Accountability practices and incentive structures at the frontlines of firms establish the parameters under which frontline managers and workers engage in the process of scheduling. As a result, they are an important context for understanding the nature of work in low-level hourly jobs and the potential pitfalls of implementing scheduling flexibility in them.

Cost containment as a goal. U.S. firms are increasingly adopting business models that give priority to cost containment over quality of goods or services as a route to profitability (Kalleberg, 2009; Lambert, 2008). Under such business models, payment for labor that exceeds narrow definitions of demand (e.g., number of customers, rooms, flights, tables) is viewed as an unnecessary expense and a threat to profitability. Across industries, frontline managers are held responsible for keeping a tight link between variations in demand and outlays for wages. For example, in retail firms, managers responsible for scheduling either at the store or department level are expected to maintain a particular ratio between demand (either sales or traffic) and hours distributed to employees (Lambert, 2008). Frontline managers are given a total number of hours to assign staff based on projected sales (or traffic) derived from recent retail trends and last year's numbers. In some firms, they are also given staffing guidelines of the desired number of workers to assign for each shift, based not only on sales projections but also considerations for loss protection and employee safety.

Similar projections of demand in other industries are used to establish the overall number of hours that frontline managers have available to schedule their staff, and corporate guidelines provide instruction as to how these employees should be deployed throughout the day, week and year. In food services for airlines, shifts are booked depending on the mix of domestic and international flights, which vary by day of week and can change when flights are delayed or cancelled. Hotel housekeeping staff are scheduled based on projected room census, and workers in lock-box jobs in banks are scheduled according to projections of payments to process, with more workers being scheduled at the beginning of the month when public checks are cut and at the end of the month when bills tend to be due. In restaurants, managers monitor food sales and flow of customers (see Lambert, 2008 and Haley-Lock, 2008 for more on these jobs).

Summary. The goal of tightly linking variations in consumer demand to expenditures for labor, and the implementation of the ensuing accountability requirements, constrain the choices that frontline managers can make in scheduling workers and in turn, the choices that workers have available to them. These circumstances make it difficult if not impossible for managers responsible for scheduling to meet every worker's preferences for work hours while also meeting the firm's accountability requirements for "staying within hours." Certainly the work of managerial and other professional workers also varies by demand, as anyone who has faced project deadlines or teaching schedules can attest. Nonetheless, the goal of minimizing outlays for labor by holding managers accountable for coupling labor to ongoing variations in demand – by week, day, and for some firms, hour – shapes the nature of work in low-level hourly jobs in ways that create a unique and challenging context for delivering meaningful flexibility to workers.

The Policy Context for Scheduling in Low-Level Hourly Jobs

Labor costs in hourly jobs can be both fixed (per employee) or variable (per hour worked). Regulations specified in law or in legally-binding collective bargaining agreements can thus temper employers' ability to achieve cost minimization in hourly jobs by either increasing the fixed costs of labor, such as requiring employers to pay per-employee health insurance premiums, or by establishing a floor on variable costs, such as mandating employers to pay a minimum wage or minimum hours.

Fixed labor costs. In the United States currently, fixed costs are incurred by employers at their own discretion or as a result of collective bargaining rather than as a product of legislation. Given that only eight percent of private industry workers (12.3 percent overall) were covered by collective bargaining agreements in 2009, it is perhaps unsurprising that hourly jobs in the U.S. come with few fixed costs (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010b). Most notably, although employers remain the primary source of health insurance for working-age adults in the U.S., the lack of a legislative mandate to provide coverage has meant that firms have had discretion over which segments of their work force they would cover, if any. Increases in the cost of health care have provided strong incentives for firms to reduce the fixed costs of labor by restricting access to health insurance coverage. For example, in the retail sector, as of 2006 only 52 percent of full-time workers and 16.4 percent of part-time workers had employer-sponsored health insurance; across industries, only 18.6 percent of part-time workers were insured through their employer.[3]

The convention in the U.S. of making eligibility for employer-sponsored health insurance contingent on full-time job status creates an incentive for U.S. firms to keep work hours below the number needed to claim eligibility (Houseman, 2001). Cross-national comparisons of jobs suggest that not conditioning health insurance on job status reduces employer incentives to limit hours for individual workers. For example, Haley-Lock (forthcoming) found that in Vancouver where health care is publicly provided, restaurants relied less on part-time staff than many of their American counterparts and thus gave workers a chance to get more hours, an observation echoed by Carre, Tilly & Holgate (2008) in the cross-national comparisons of low-wage retail jobs. Thus, the ability of employers to avoid fixed costs by limiting employees' work hours has implications for whether workers will be scheduled for "enough" hours.

[3]Source:. H.L. Shaefer unpublished analysis of 2006 CPS data. Part-time workers are defined as those who report working less than 35 hours per week at all jobs. Annual averages used.

However, the lion's share of labor costs in hourly jobs is variable rather than fixed, incurred per hour of actual work. In addition to wages that are paid by the hour, employers' contributions to Social Security (old age pension), Unemployment Insurance, and Worker Compensation (disability insurance) also constitute variable costs, incurred as a percentage of wages paid. Although employers can reduce labor costs by advocating for restrictions to employer contributions to social insurances (and many do), the key mechanisms employers use day-to-day to control labor costs in hourly jobs are restricting hourly wage rates, hours worked, or both. Thus, in order to understand the nature of scheduling in hourly jobs, it is important to consider regulatory provisions that set a floor on hourly wages and work hours.

<u>Variable labor costs: minimum wage legislation</u>. Minimum wage legislation, defined in both federal and state laws, is intended to provide a floor on hourly wages. Since its inception as part of the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, employers have been quite successful at keeping this cost low. Federal minimum wage increases are not automatically linked to changes in the cost of living and as a result, federally legislated changes to the minimum wage have been sporadic over time and have not kept up with the rate of inflation. 2008 saw the first federally-mandated increase in a decade, when the federal minimum wage rose from $5.15 to $5.85, with scheduled incremental hikes taking it to the current rate of $7.25 (U.S. Department of Labor, 2008). Adjusted for inflation, the current value is still 17 percent lower than in 1968 (Filion, 2009). Some states provide a more generous floor; 14 states and the District of Columbia have legislated higher minimum wages that as of 2010 range from $7.30 in Ohio to $8.55 in Washington State (U.S. Department of Labor, 2009a). Nine states automatically adjust the minimum wage annually to reflect changes in cost of living.

Even though laws govern minimum hourly wages in the U.S., it is questionable how much these standards drive labor costs in most hourly jobs. Only 4.9 percent of U.S. workers in hourly jobs overall are paid the minimum wage (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010a). Either by choice or as a result of collective bargaining, most employers pay most hourly workers a wage in excess of the mandated minimum. Minimum wage jobs are, however, over-represented in leisure and hospitality (20.8 percent of workers there earn no more than the minimum wage) and retail (5.1 percent; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010a). Recent evidence suggests that employer scheduling practices are sensitive to increases in the minimum wage. Specifically, state laws to increase minimum wages have in some studies been associated with reductions in headcount and/or work hours particularly in the lowest-paying jobs, although the resulting disemployment effects appear to be modest (Neumark, 2009).

The inadequacy of the floor provided by minimum-wage legislation is less controversial. Even with full-time hours, annual earnings for a job at the federal minimum wage in 2009 ($14,500) fell far short of bringing a family of four with one worker over the poverty line ($22,050), and are only modestly above poverty for a single individual ($10,830) (Edelman, Greenberg, Holt & Holzer, 2009). Although employers may not pay at the minimum, many pay close to it. A significantly higher proportion of adults in the U.S. earn low wages as compared to their counterparts in western industrialized nations (Mason & Salverda, 2009). Recent analyses of labor market trends also indicate a "growing stickiness of low-wage careers" in which adults move from one low-paying job to another (Bernhardt, Morris, Handcock & Scott, 2001; Boushey, 2005).

Even the modest floor provided by minimum wage laws, both federal and state, is not without holes. Minimum wage legislation in 43 states have "tip credit" provisions that establish a sub-minimum wage for workers who regularly receive some amount of customer gratuities (at least $30 per month according to the federal law, but some states have no tip threshold that employees must pass before employers can utilize the credit) (U.S. Department of Labor, 2009b). These alternative pay rates range from $2.13 in Kansas to $7.00 in Hawaii. "Tip credits" allow employers an "exit strategy" from minimum wage laws, and are an example of how firms may lower costs by passing the cost of labor directly onto consumers (Appelbaum, Bosch, et al., 2009). Additionally, many restaurant employers opt to offset the impacts of mandated minimum wages by requiring waiters to "tip out," or share a portion of their tips per shift to staff who do not directly serve customers, and thus effectively cross-subsidize the costs for the latter group (Haley-Lock, forthcoming; Haley-Lock & Ewert, 2008).

<u>Variable labor costs: minimum hour legislation</u>. Unlike minimum wage legislation, U.S. federal law does not require employers to guarantee a minimum number of hours to workers, even those on a firm's payroll. Federal law regarding work hours concerns hour premiums for overtime (one and half times the hourly wage), that is, working more than 40 hours per week. Any guarantees of minimum work hours are specified in state law, collective bargaining agreements, or remain at the discretion of the employer.

Seven states as well as a range of collective bargaining agreements incorporate "reporting pay" or "minimum daily pay" provisions. These provisions require employers to pay workers for a minimum number of hours for shifts they report to work. For example, in some union hotels in Chicago, housekeeping staff must be paid for a full eight hours any day they work. States vary widely in both the industries included in reporting or minimum daily pay regulations (California, Connecticut and New York cover only non-exempt employees in select industries, Massachusetts and New Hampshire exclude non-exempt workers in public or charitable organizations, and New

Jersey and Rhode Island cover all non-exempt workers), as well as in the minimum number of hours for which employees must be paid (from one to four).[4] Minimum hour requirements, included only in collective bargaining agreements, can complement reporting pay protections by guaranteeing a minimum number of work hours per week. For example, in a unionized grocery chain in Chicago, cashiers must be scheduled for a minimum of 12 hours weekly.

The extent to which "reporting pay" and "minimum daily pay" provisions are enforced is likely to depend on whether they are specified in collective bargaining agreements or state law. A recent study of low-wage jobs in Chicago, New York, and Los Angeles revealed wide-spread violations of even basic wage and hour laws, suggesting that enforcement of state "reporting hour" laws is likely to be uneven at best (Bernhardt et al., 2009). Even if reporting or minimum daily pay provisions are readily enforced when incorporated in collective bargaining agreements, the low levels of union representation among U.S. workers suggests that these provisions only apply to a small proportion of today's workers. Notably, just 8.3 percent of employees in the accommodation industry are represented by unions, 5.9 percent in retail, and 1.8 percent in food services and drinking places (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010b).

Summary. The U.S. policy context is one in which firms can readily pursue profits through business strategies that depend on containing labor costs in hourly jobs. Federal legislation sets a floor, albeit modest, on wage rates but not work hours, in either part-time or full-time jobs. In industries where demand fluctuates by season, day of the week, and hour, employers thus face few incentives to concentrate hours on individual workers or to schedule them for consistent hours.

[4] Source: Provided by Attorney Ellen Neely working in conjunction with *Women Employed*, Chicago, IL.

Overview of Studies

In the remaining sections of this paper, we draw on both U.S. Census data and findings from three studies of low-level hourly jobs to identify conditions of work that can complicate the implementation of conventional approaches to schedule flexibility. All three studies were designed to investigate the everyday realities of work in low-level hourly jobs, defined as jobs paid by the hour that require no more than a high school degree. We briefly summarize each study below, providing citations that give a fuller description of the studies and their findings.

Study of Organizational Stratification (SOS)

This study employed comparative organizational analysis that combined multiple sources of data (firm human resource (HR) records, interviews with HR staff and managers, observation of jobs) with the goal of furthering understanding of variations (across jobs, workplaces, and industries) in human resource policies and daily employer practices shaping work conditions in low-level hourly jobs. Data were collected between 1999 and 2004 at 22 work sites in the Chicago area, involving 17 major U.S. corporations in four industries: hospitality (hotels and catering, sites = 7), transportation (air lines and package delivery services, sites = 3), retail (stores and distribution centers, sites = 10), and financial services (banks, sites = 2). The selection of workplaces and jobs was purposeful, targeted to industries with large proportions of low-skill workers. Several of the companies included in the study have appeared on lists of the best companies to work for in America. Detailed data on job conditions (e.g., wages, training, advancement, benefits) were gathered on four specific low-level jobs at each worksite (total = 88 jobs) including scheduling policies and practices.[5]

[5] SOS was funded by grants from the Ford Foundation. See Henly & Lambert (2006), Lambert (2008), and Lambert & Waxman (2005) for additional details of the study methodology and results.

Study of Restaurant Employment (SRE)

Taking the front-line hourly job of waiter as an analytical focus, this comparative organizational and policy case study was designed to illuminate the relationships between governmental regulations of and supports for employment, restaurant business strategy, and frontline employment practices. Data were collected from a sample of 36 full-service restaurants affiliated with one of two U.S.-based chains and independently-owned restaurants, all positioned in the low end of their respective markets. The restaurants spanned three disparate public policy contexts: Washington State, Illinois, and British Columbia, Canada. Within Washington, sites include one urban area (four independent and one chain-affiliated from each of the two chains), one rural (four independent and one site of one of the chains), and one suburban (four independent and four sites of each chain); Illinois includes four sites of each chain around suburban Chicago. In suburban Vancouver, five out of a possible six sites of the two chains participated in the study. [6] Semi-structured interviews with managers and owners were conducted at each restaurant during 2007 (U.S. sites) and 2008 (Canada). Questions focused on three sets of employment conditions: wages and tips, fringe benefits, and staffing and scheduling practices, including amount of input waiters had into work hours and days, frequency of scheduling changes, and restaurants' use of full- versus part-time job statuses.

Work Scheduling Study (WSS)

This ongoing study is designed to improve understanding of the relationship between work schedules and worker performance and well-being in low-level hourly jobs in the U.S. retail sector. The study has both nonexperimental and experimental components. The nonexperimental component examines managers' labor flexibility practices and their relationship

[6] WRE was funded by the West Coast Poverty Center and Harry Bridges Center for Labor Studies, both at the University of Washington. Additional detail about study design and methods is provided in Haley-Lock (forthcoming, 2008).

to store-level outcomes (e.g., turnover) and worker-level outcomes (e.g., employee engagement and sales) as well as relationships between different dimensions of work schedules (stability, predictability, flexibility) and worker performance and well-being. The experimental component is an evaluation of a workplace intervention designed to increase the predictability of employee schedules. The site for the study is a national women's apparel retailer that includes small stores (average staff size of ten employees), located mostly in suburban strip malls. The workforce is virtually all (99 percent) female but diverse in terms of race and ethnicity, age, and job tenure. The data for WSS include corporate administrative data on monthly store turnover and demographics of each stores' workforce (151 stores; N=1,179 hourly employees), telephone survey data of store managers (139/151 managers participated in the survey), and for the stores in the Chicago area that participated in the experiment (n=21), additional data on the actual hours employees worked over the 37-week experiment (from corporate payroll records) and two waves of telephone survey data with employees and managers.[7]

Caveats to Work Schedule Flexibility in Low-Level Hourly Jobs

As we have noted, managers responsible for scheduling do so in the context of accountability requirements that pressure them to tightly couple labor to ongoing variations in demand and the absence of countervailing requirements to provide workers with a minimum number of hours. In this section, we draw on both U.S. Census data and findings from the three studies described above to identify how this context shapes everyday workplace realities in ways that complicate the implementation of two common forms of schedule flexibility: working reduced hours and varying start and end times. In the next section, we expand upon this analysis

[7] *WSS* is funded by the Ford Foundation, the Russell Sage Foundation, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, and the Center for Center for Health Administration Studies at the University of Chicago. See Henly & Lambert (2010), Lambert (2009), and Lambert & Henly (2010) for additional details of the methodology.

to identify unintended negative consequences that can sometimes result when these forms of schedule flexibility are implemented in hourly jobs characterized by scarce and fluctuating work hours.

Reduced Hours: The Complicating Reality of Underemployment in Hourly Jobs

Much of the current discourse around flexibility incorporates expanding options for working reduced hours, i.e., part-time. Not only do many low-level hourly jobs already provide this opportunity, many do not provide workers with enough hours of work. Although America's workers average the highest number of hours per week when compared to its wealthy European cousins (Mason & Salverda, 2009), averages mask variability. National census data indicate that a substantial proportion of workers in the U.S., especially workers of color in hourly jobs, would prefer to work more rather than fewer hours per week.

<u>Involuntary part-time employment</u>. Certainly the current recession is contributing to underemployment, as evidenced by the proportion of American workers classified as involuntary part-time, defined by the Census Bureau as working less than 35 hours a week for economic reasons (i.e., could not find a full-time job or work hours reduced due to slack demand) rather than by choice. In November 2009, 9.2 million workers fell into that category, the highest level in recorded history (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010c). This is not, however, the first spike in involuntary part-time employment. For example, the labor market added 1.5 million involuntary part-time workers between 1981 and 1982 (for a total of 6.8 million workers), surging up again to add 2.3 million between 1992 and 1993 (for a total of 6.7 million workers). The lowest level of involuntary part-time employment in the past thirty years was in 2000-2001 and even then, 3.1 million Americans reported that they were working part-time hours

involuntarily (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010c). Millions of American workers do not get as many hours as they would like even during relatively good economic times.

A preference for additional rather than reduced hours. Census data on work hour preferences help clarify which workers would prefer additional hours. A nationally representative sample of U.S. workers was asked the question: “If you had a choice at your main job would you prefer to work fewer hours but earn less money, work more hours and earn more money, or work the same number of hours and earn the same money?”[8] The contrast between the proportions of women preferring more versus fewer hours is especially stark among women paid by the hour, who constitute the majority of women in the paid work force. In 2001, almost a third (27.4 percent) of women in hourly jobs preferred to work more hours to earn more, whereas only 7.3 percent reported that they would prefer to work less if it meant earning less. Among women paid by a salary, on the other hand, 16.9 percent reported that they would prefer to work more hours while 11.6 percent would like to work less even if it meant lower earnings.

Hourly employment and the desire for more hours is, further, disproportionately concentrated among workers of color. Among women in hourly jobs, a preference for additional hours of work was greatest among women of color who were even more likely than white women to hold an hourly job (60.6 percent of white women, 69.2 percent of African American women, 72.2 percent of Hispanic women, and 63.4 percent of women in other race/ethnic groups who were members of the wage and salaried workforce were paid by the hour in 2001). Notably, more than one-third of African-American and Hispanic women in hourly jobs (38.4 percent of African American women and 35.9 percent of Hispanic women) reported that they would prefer additional hours of work.

[8] Note that 2001 is a time period prior to the current recession when involuntary part-time employment was technically at a 30-year low.

As with women, the majority of men, especially men of color, worked in hourly jobs: 54 percent of white men, 70.1 percent of African American men, 74.7 percent of Hispanic men, and 59.2 percent of men of other races/ethnicities were paid by the hour in 2001. Also, similar to women, the preference for additional work hours was especially pronounced among men in hourly jobs, especially men of color. Notably, fully 42.8 percent of African American men and almost half (49.4 percent) of Hispanic men working in hourly jobs reported that they would prefer to work more hours for more pay.

Barriers to getting "enough" hours. The preference for additional hours of work is mirrored in the experiences of part-time sales associates in the *Work Scheduling Study* (WSS), who were asked the same question about work-hour preferences noted above. Among part-time sales associates (all women), 45.8 percent of whites, 57.1 percent of African Americans, and 71.4 percent of Hispanics reported that they would prefer to work additional hours at the company studied. When asked the reasons why they did not work additional hours, fully 84.8 percent reported that it was because the store manager did not have additional hours to assign them. This is contrasted with 23.9 percent who reported that the store manager would not assign them available hours and 24 percent who reported that the available shifts did not fit with their personal responsibilities. Thus, these employees' ability to work additional hours, and earn additional pay, was limited by accountability pressures on managers to "stay within hours." Managers substantiated this claim. When asked how often requirements established by the firm to staff within the hour limits interfere with key business objectives, store managers reported that hour limits regularly (27 percent weekly; 22.6 percent a few times a month) make it hard for them to provide sales associates with enough hours.

From both WSS survey data and qualitative interviews with store managers, it is clear that managers cannot easily ignore requirements set by the corporation that hold them accountable for matching staffing hours to demand. Indeed, managers rated the goal of "staying within hours" as even more important than meeting their sales quotas (Lambert & Henly, 2010). Moreover, managers' responses suggest that they give priority to hour limits over employee preferences when scheduling their stores. Specifically, 83 percent of the store managers surveyed reported that staying within the hour limits set by the corporation is "very important" in scheduling their store, while only 32 percent said that employees' preferences for work hours and days were "very important" and 60 percent who said that having the right mix of skills was "very important" in scheduling their store. In setting these priorities, managers were aware that not providing associates with "enough" hours of work could affect turnover in their stores. Almost one-half (48.9 percent) reported that providing associates with hours is "very important" to retention and the majority reported that at least one sales associate had left in the last year because the associate did get enough hours (51.1 percent of managers said this had occurred) or because she had secured a full-time position (63.3 percent of managers said this had occurred).

Start and End Times May Already Fluctuate

The current flexibility discourse gives substantial attention to providing workers with the opportunity to adjust the time they begin and end work, with the explicit purpose of moving away from set schedules that demand everyone be present at the work site at the same time. Evidence suggests that a large proportion of hourly workers would indeed benefit from greater control over their start and end times. For example, according to data from the U.S. General Social Survey (2002 and 2006, and accompanying work orientation modules), when asked "How often are you allowed to change your starting and quitting times on a daily basis?," 27 percent of salaried but 41 percent of hourly paid workers reported “never” (Golden, Lambert, Henly, & Wiens-Tuers, forthcoming). Care has to be taken, however, not to assume that this means that these workers’ starting and quitting times are fixed. Although workers may not control their starting and ending times, given the aforementioned pressures for cost containment on the frontlines of firms, this does not mean that their schedules do not vary, even daily. Unfortunately, due to ambiguity in survey item wording, it is difficult to get an accurate read from national data on how much workers’ hours vary, both in terms of number of hours worked per week and the timing of hours.

<u>National data on fluctuating work hours</u>. The items included in many national surveys of individuals were developed in an earlier period characterized by widespread standard employment (full-time jobs with stable schedules) and were designed intentionally to smooth variations to capture the “average.” For example, most national surveys include items asking employees to report their ”usual” hours of work, including usual start and end times, and the usual hours they worked “last week.” If respondents report that they cannot answer the “usual hours” questions because their hours vary too much to do so, some surveys allow for a variable hours code. For example, per the Census Bureau, “hours vary” is a default category that is only offered to respondents who volunteer that their hours vary too much for them to report usual work hours. Pooling CPS data from 2000 through 2002 (N=41,947), 6.4 percent of workers were coded as hours “vary too much.” The problem with using this approach to capture hour stability is that respondents with variable hours may indeed still provide usual work hours in response to the survey question. Thus, current survey measures are likely to underestimate the proportion of workers whose hours regularly fluctuate. Analyses of the payroll data on the actual hours worked by participants in the *Work Scheduling Study* demonstrate that for this sample of

retail workers employed by a women's apparel firm, most everyone's work schedules are characterized by fluctuations in the number and timing of work hours. Even so, when asked on the employee survey about typical work hours, only five (out of 136) respondents volunteered that their "hours vary too much" to report usual hours or days; the rest provided a numeric response.

Case-study evidence on fluctuating work hours. Ours and others' studies of jobs in non-production industries (c.f., Bernhardt, Boushey, Dresser, & Tilly, 2008; Carre, Tilly, van Kalveren, & Voss-Dahm, 2009; Swanberg, James, Mamta, Werner, & McKechnie, 2008; Williams, 2006) provide reason to believe that fluctuating work hours are widespread in hourly non-production jobs. In the retail stores studied as part of the SOS, for example (see Lambert, 2008; Henly, Shaefer, & Waxman, 2006), sales associates and cashiers were required to work a mix of daytime and weekend/evening shifts, especially those in full-time positions. In other settings such as banks and hotels, workers were scheduled for a set number of days each week, but the specific days worked would change from week to week (e.g., Monday, Tuesday, and Saturday one week; Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday the next week). This means that although an employee may hold a three-, four-, or five-days-a-week job, variations over time in the particular days of week worked provide little stability around which to structure nonwork activities.

Given that employers adjust hours to fluctuating demand, the number of hours jobs require can vary season-to-season, week-to-week, and even day-to-day, as highlighted by the following examples from the SOS. Housekeepers in one Chicago hotel were expected to work six days a week in the summer and then were given few if any hours for several weeks during the winter. In the airline catering business, hours varied week-to-week. Workers were expected to work overtime during busy weeks and routinely sent home early during slow periods. Moreover, in some jobs the length of time worked on any given day varied, even when weekly schedules were relatively fixed. For example, in one bank, workers performing jobs processing checks for commercial customers were required to stay until all daily transactions had been completed. As a result, a shift could be six to ten hours depending on the quantity of mail received that day. In other jobs, employees worked a fixed shift without a variable start time, as in the cases of overnight workers at one retail store who always started at 11pm and airlines and catering firms adopting standard starting times for three different shifts. But workers in these fixed-time shift jobs were regularly at risk of being moved involuntarily from one shift to another depending on seniority, job vacancies, and/or work demands.

Low-level hourly employees face further instability as a result of employers' practices of adjusting work schedules after they have been posted and sending workers home (or telling them not to come in) when business is slow. For example, in the *Study of Restaurant Employment* the owner of an independently-owned restaurant in rural Washington State described a detailed approach to tracking the ratio of labor costs to sales: if the proportion exceeds 29 percent by 3pm, or appears unlikely to drop to the owner's preferred target of 21 percent by the end of the business day, he and his managers begin sending some waitstaff home. Numerous other managers and owners in both independent and chain restaurants and suburban and urban Washington settings – as well as suburban Chicago – more or less echoed this practice, often noting that waiters were selected to be sent home based on seniority or performance (i.e., the newest and weakest were sent home first). Just a few restaurant sites had waitstaff work on other tasks during "down times" – for example, food prep and cleaning – while a few others asked for volunteers rather than selecting waiters to send home. These practices are similar to those found in the study of Chicago firms (SOS) in which frontline hourly workers across industries were regularly sent home, and sometimes called in, depending on whether demand disappointed or exceeded projections (Lambert, 2008).

Unanticipated Consequences of Conventional Flexibility Options in Hourly Jobs

It could be argued that implementing flexibility should be easier in jobs in which hours already fluctuate as compared to jobs with set or steady schedules. If this were the case, transforming instability in work hours into flexibility for workers would be a matter of providing workers with greater control over the timing of their work, or increasing so-called employee-driven flexibility. However, under circumstances in which minimum hours are not guaranteed, costs are mostly variable, and frontline managers are held accountable for pairing labor to ongoing demand, the possibilities for meaningful employee control are not only potentially slim but also potentially fraught with unintended negative consequences for both workers and their coworkers.

As we explain below, in jobs with scarce and fluctuating hours, flexibility options that are designed to provide hourly workers greater control over their work hours can disadvantage workers by restricting opportunities for sustained employment and earnings. Further, the zero-sum game created among workers when employers apply strict limits to total labor hours means that control granted to one employee tends to lessen control enjoyed by coworkers. We want to emphasize that our analysis is not intended to denigrate current efforts to increase flexibility in hourly jobs but rather, to instead expand notions of and opportunities for flexibility in hourly jobs. As our prior analysis suggests, the need for control over the number and timing of work hours is especially dire in low-level hourly jobs with scarce and fluctuating hours.

Restricting availability restricts income. Many service industry employers allow employees to "claim availability," which permits individuals holding jobs like sales associate and waiter to declare the days and times they are available and unavailable for work. Our research suggests that rather than providing workers with control over their work time, in practice this form of schedule flexibility often provides workers with control over their nonwork time only. That is, claiming availability enables workers to influence when they will not be scheduled to work, but does not ensure that they will be scheduled to work when they are available. When workers restrict their availability during peak times of demand, for example evenings and weekends in retail, they are placed at a disadvantage for garnering hours of work. Moreover, limiting availability remains out of reach for many employees whose jobs require them to have "open availability" – declaring a readiness to work any day or time – as a condition of employment or in order to qualify for full-time positions.

Data from managers participating in the *Work Scheduling Study* highlight the relationship between availability and potential earnings. Fully 94 percent of the store managers surveyed agreed that "they try to hire workers with maximum availability" and importantly, 79 percent agreed that "they give more hours to sales associates with greater availability." In contrast, 89 percent disagreed with the statement "I give more hours to sales associates who seem to really need the money." Regardless of employees' need for income or their preferences for additional work hours, frontline managers have a limited number of hours to distribute among their staff. Those workers who place constraints on availability may not be hired, and if hired they may receive fewer hours and subsequently lower earnings than coworkers with greater availability. Thus without minimum hour guarantees or normative pressures to provide them, workers may in effect pay for the ability to control their nonwork schedule.

Similarly, when hours are scarce and there are no minimum hour guarantees, workers who attempt to change their availability after the schedule has been posted are also at risk of lost wages. Employees hungry for hours are more willing to cover a coworker's shift than to trade shifts. "Flexibility" for the worker needing coverage may then wind up being a lost shift, and lost income – with a coworker volunteering to take but not exchange work hours.

<u>Not all hours are equal</u>. In many service jobs, hours also vary in their income-generating prospects. Employers' practice of sending workers home when the pace of sales lags means that some hours – for example, certain restaurant shifts that precede or follow meal times, or fall on quieter days – are more likely to be cancelled due to "slow traffic." Employees scheduled during these times thus face the risk of not being able to work all or some of those hours, as reflected by the rural Washington restaurant manager in the SRE study who began sending home waiters at 3 o' clock on slow afternoons (Haley-Lock, 2009). As reported by many other managers who also reduce staff during slow times, newly-hired waiters and those viewed as being weaker performers were more likely to be both scheduled for shifts known to be slow, as well as sent home when there were few customers (Haley-Lock & Ewert, 2008). Similar practices received national attention after an article in the *Wall Street Journal* revealed how high-end retailer Ann Taylor had implemented a computerized "workforce-management" system that distributed work hours to sales associates on the basis of their sales-per-hour, giving low performers both fewer hours and lower-traffic shifts (O'Connell, 2008).

In the restaurant industry and jobs receiving customer gratuities, slow shifts have another potential effect on employee income, and as a result may constrain how free employees feel to limit their availability. Busy shifts in a restaurant mean more food and drink sales and consequently higher waiter tips, given the percentage basis on which tips are customarily calculated in the U.S. When a waiter cannot work one or more high-traffic shifts, her prospects for earning an adequate wage are reduced. Exacerbating this, if that same waiter winds up being unable to work one of her shifts, she may have an especially hard time negotiating a trade with coworkers who get more lucrative shifts assigned to them; she may thus lose the shift and the income. Several of the managers interviewed for the SRE study noted that differential earnings across hours can be compounded by differences in customer traffic and even generosity across sections of the same restaurant – a popular, fast-turnover front area versus the dark, sparse back room, for example (Haley-Lock & Ewert, 2008).

Worker flexibility, workforce instability. As we have noted, holders of low-level hourly jobs within the same firm are often in direct competition for hours and shifts. Whether a worker makes a request to management to change hours or to a coworker to swap shifts, achieving schedule flexibility often means imposing greater instability on someone else. That is, other employees are often expected to absorb the need for coverage and effectively "create" flexibility for their coworkers. Though the trend in underemployment among lower-level hourly jobs likely creates a set of colleagues eager to add hours, these often last-minute adjustments may still unsettle careful balancing acts between work and home obligations.

When hourly employees make scheduling requests, they may thus be putting not only their earnings but their relationships with both coworkers and managers at risk. For example, 55.8 percent of store managers in the *Work Scheduling Study* reported that they had denied a schedule request from a sales associate who "had asked for too many scheduling changes." The toll on personal relationships is not unique to hourly workers; work-life literature provides evidence that flexibility options benefiting certain groups (e.g., parents) may create a backlash in the workplace as others (e.g., young, childless workers) are pressed to complete additional job tasks (Ryan & Kossek, 2008). Hourly workers also share with professional workers a certain level of dependence on colleagues if they are to realize schedule flexibility. In the WSS, for example, 86.1 percent of store managers reported that sales associates are required to find a coworker to cover their shift before they change their hours on a posted schedule; 64.9 percent of managers reported that sales associates are required to find someone to cover their shift when calling off work that same day. Thus, asking a coworker to trade shifts or calling in sick – either for the worker or a child – may come at the cost of decreasing future access to "flexibility."

Improving Work Schedule Flexibility in Hourly Jobs

Contemporary initiatives designed to enhance flexibility for workers by loosening up rigid job schedules do not map well onto hourly jobs already characterized by fluctuating and scarce work hours. In these jobs, conventional options that seemingly provide greater control over work hours can disadvantage workers by placing their employment and earnings at risk and generating instability in the lives of coworkers. Below, we offer recommendations for incorporating flexibility into hourly work in ways that account for the realities of work hour fluctuations and scarcity. Specifically, we suggest three directions for improving work schedules in low-level hourly jobs that recognize both the U.S. business context of seeking to tightly couple outlays for labor to variations in demand and the U.S. policy context that does not guarantee a minimum number of work hours.

Increasing Schedule Stability, Predictability, and Flexibility in Hourly Jobs

As explained earlier, work schedules in hourly jobs are often posted with limited advance notice, often just a few days before the upcoming workweek. In jobs with fluctuating work hours, this means that work schedules are not only unstable but also unpredictable. The lack of schedule predictability has been shown to interfere with the ability of workers to remain employed, secure child care and transportation, and plan nonwork activities, such as scheduling doctor's appointments, attending classes, and participating in children's school activities (Henly, et al., 2006; Henly & Lambert, 2010). Thus, one possibility for improving scheduling practices in low-level hourly jobs is to post schedules further in advance. Another possibility is to reduce hour fluctuations in these jobs. Doing the latter would in effect contribute not only to schedule stability but also predictability because the more stable the schedule, the better workers can anticipate their work and nonwork time regardless of when schedules are posted. Given the lack of minimum hour guarantees in low-level hourly jobs and employers' preferences for workers' wide availability, improving schedule predictability and stability are likely to place workers' earnings at less risk than conventional flexibility options that compel workers to limit their availability for work.

This is not to say that workers do not need greater input into their work schedules; indeed, predictability can turn into rigidity if workers do not have any influence over when they work. Yet without a set schedule or minimum hour guarantees, this form of schedule flexibility may still come at a price. Findings from the *Work Scheduling Study* provide evidence that both schedule flexibility, defined in the study as worker input into the days, timing, and number of work hours, and schedule predictability, defined as advance notice of work schedules, contribute positively to employee well-being and work-life outcomes (Henly & Lambert, 2010). Multivariate analyses of WSS employee survey data indicate that both forms of flexibility explain significant variation in sales associates' stress, work-to-family conflict, and interferences with nonwork activities such as scheduling doctor's appointments, socializing with friends, and eating meals together as a family. The results further indicate, however, that input does not overcome the deleterious effects of having an unpredictable work schedule, at least not in the retail jobs studied. Unpredictable schedules are more powerful than schedule input for sales associates in the WSS sample, meaning that even with the ability to have some schedule flexibility, unpredictable schedules remain negatively related to these key outcomes.

Given employers' penchant for tightly coupling labor to ongoing variations in demand, the possibility of improving predictability and stability in hourly jobs may seem unrealistic. To the contrary, though, findings from the *Work Scheduling Study* suggest that firms' labor requirements may be more stable than is commonly recognized. Store managers were asked the minimum and maximum number of staffing hours their store had been assigned over the preceding year (2007-2008). Their responses indicate that the average difference between the highest and lowest number of staffing hours assigned the stores was only 19 percent. Although some stores saw greater reductions than this (12 percent of the stores had over 30 percent hour reductions), 20 percent experienced far smaller drops (10 percent or less) and overall, 80 percent of staffing hours remained stable throughout the course of the year for the majority of stores (Lambert & Henly, 2010). Store managers in this firm thus had a large base of stable hours throughout the year, opening up the possibility of creating fairly stable schedules for sales associates or at least providing workers with advance notice. In-depth analyses of scheduling practices in a subset of stores suggest that managers varied in the extent to which they structured this stability into sales associates' work schedules.

Further investigation of staffing requirements in other firms is clearly needed before conclusions can be drawn regarding the possibility of "hidden stability" in hours. Even if the stability in staffing requirements is more modest than suggested by the *Work Scheduling Study*, frontline managers may still be able to find ways to capitalize on whatever amount of stability there is in the business to provide workers in low-level hourly jobs with more predictable work schedules, either by posting schedules further in advance or by directly reducing fluctuations in the number and timing of employees' work hours. Currently, managers are more likely to focus on the instability than the stability in labor requirements. For example in the WSS, many managers hesitated to post work schedules until they knew exactly how many hours they would have for the upcoming workweek, even though weekly staffing hours for the store typically varied by less than ten hours week-to-week and there are known staffing requirements that must be met regardless of staffing hour allotments.

Increasing Fixed Labor Costs

In the context of business strategies that seek to contain labor costs by coupling labor to ongoing variations in demand, managers have little incentive to concentrate work hours on individual employees. Instead, managers are propelled to maintain a pool of workers who can be drawn on as needed to work short shifts during times of peak demand, thus contributing to workers' hunger for hours (Lambert, 2008). Raising the fixed costs of labor in hourly jobs could mitigate the press to keep headcount high and thus individuals' work hours low.

Reporting hour and minimum hour provisions in effect transform a variable cost for firms into one that is at least partially fixed. There is some evidence to suggest that doing so can compel employers to manage labor costs differently. For example, in the SRE study, Haley-Lock (forthcoming) found that American managers often sent scheduled waiters home or called them to tell them not to come in when business was unexpectedly slow. None of the managers in the Canadian sites of the same chains reported this practice, however. Haley-Lock attributed this finding to the presence of a British Columbia reporting pay or "minimum daily wage" law (Haley-Lock, forthcoming). There, employers are legally required to pay employees for at least two hours when scheduled for up to four, even if the employer opted to send them home early from a shift; individuals scheduled for eight or more hours must be paid for at least four (British Columbia Ministry of Labour & Services, 2009). Carre, Tilly & Holgate (2008, 15) also observed that a minimum daily pay law in Mexico made part-time jobs "rare in retail…since retailers would have to pay a full day's wage in any case." Raising firms' fixed labor costs by compelling them to give employees more hours – as with higher wages – poses at least the theoretical risk of increased unemployment, although recent comparative studies across European countries cast some doubt on such arguments (Mason & Salverda, 2009).

The ongoing effort to reform health insurance in the United States also holds implications for fixed labor costs in low-level hourly jobs. The most recent reform effort was in part propelled by American businesses that asserted that the burden of employer-based health insurance was having crippling competitive effects in an increasingly global marketplace, within which firms from most other countries enjoy governmental coverage of these expenses (Carey, 2007; Johnson, 2010). The health care reform measures signed into law in March 2010 (the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act and the Health Care and Education Reconciliation Act) continue an employer-based approach, however. By 2014, employers with 50 or more employees will be required either to provide "affordable" health insurance to employees or else pay a "shared responsibility fee" (U.S. White House, 2010). Even if tax breaks for compliance reduce the overall amount employers pay for health insurance, by extending health benefits (and thus health costs) to new segments of a firm's workforce, this law should increase the fixed costs of labor in low-level hourly jobs. To the extent firms are successfully constrained from conditioning coverage on employee job status (as they do now with part-time workers excluded from coverage), these laws may provide an incentive to concentrate hours on smaller numbers of workers in low-level hourly jobs.

Employee Cross-Training

Firms that are willing to cross-train front-line hourly employees provide them with an additional route to working more hours (also see Corporate Voices for Working Families, 2009, for a discussion of this point). As noted earlier, Haley-Lock & Ewert (2008) found that in lieu of sending staff home during slow shifts, some managers reassigned waiters to other tasks such as food prep and stocking and cleaning. In those settings, then, managers enlisted a strategy of cross-training servers, however formally or informally. As a result, employees were more likely to work all or most of their scheduled hours even when business was slow.

In the context of firms being required to provide full-time hours by virtue of law, collective bargaining agreements, or else discretionary business practices, cross-training provides a strategy for ensuring the productivity of employees during times of low demand. It also facilitates leave-taking by other employees whose job tasks can be more reliably completed in their absence. Thus, cross-training is an example of a flexibility option that might appear to be employer-driven but that can benefit employees as well. Of course, the advantages to workers of cross-training will be reaped only if employers refrain from using it as a tool to intensify work, that is, to force employees to "work faster and harder" in the same title and for the same compensation (Burchell, 2002, 61).

Conclusion

Efforts to include hourly workers in the public discourse on workplace flexibility are needed and laudable. Our analyses raise concerns, however, about the extent to which conventional flexibility options serve their intended purpose when applied to jobs in which start and end times already vary and workers are more concerned about getting enough hours rather than too many. Advocates for increased workplace flexibility have begun to incorporate these cautions as they advance new directions for both policy and employer practice. For example, *Working Mother Magazine's* recent list of the "Best Companies for Hourly Workers" highlights five companies that provide workers with advance notice of their monthly schedules (Bowers, 2010). Most notably, the public policy initiative, *Workplace Flexibility 2010*, the national non-profit policy organization, *Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)*, and the national advocacy organization for women's economic advancement, *Women Employed*, have made schedule predictability a core element of their policy recommendations in recent years (see Levin-Epstein [CLASP], 2006; Workplace Flexibility *2010*, 2009).

This attention to an expanded menu of flexibility options is timely. The industries in which jobs with fluctuating hours are concentrated – retail and hospitality (both accommodation and food services) – are among the fastest growing in the U.S. (U.S. Department of Labor, 2009c). Moreover, labor market trends suggest that fluctuating work hours may be expanding beyond these industries and generating a growing proportion of workers in and beyond the U.S. who work part-time hours but would prefer additional hours. Specifically, recent analyses of national data suggest that one source of growing income instability in the U.S. is within-job fluctuations in earnings (Gottschalk & Moffitt, 2009). Cross-national comparisons of part-time employment reveal that as opportunities to work reduced hours have expanded in Germany, Denmark, and France, so have these countries' rates of involuntary part-time employment (Mason & Salverda, 2009). Global labor market trends are thus magnifying the importance of expanded flexibility options that do not place workers at risk of low hours and income.

The relationship between work hours and poverty in the U.S. highlight the need to pay close attention to the effects of flexibility options on hours of work (U.S. Bureau of Labor

Statistics, 2010d). Overall, among families with at least one full-time, year-round earner (hourly or salaried), the poverty rate in 2008 was 3.5 percent. This stands in stark contrast to the 24.9 percent poverty rate among families in which at least one member held a part-time or part-year job but no member worked full-time, year-round. The protection of stable, full-time employment holds for both families headed by African American (6.6 poverty rate with at least one full-time worker vs. 43.5 percent poverty rate with no full-time worker but at least one part-time worker) and Hispanic (10.1 percent poverty rate with at least one full-time worker vs. 44.1 percent poverty rate with no full-time worker but at least one part-time worker) workers who, as discussed earlier, are already at high risk of working fewer hours than desired.

Even under a best-case scenario, however, improved work schedule flexibility in hourly jobs will not be enough to ensure that workers have the resources needed to support themselves and their families. Taking into account Kalleberg's (2009) distinction between employment instability and economic insecurity, effective scheduling flexibility options may do more to solve problems with the former than the latter. Adjustments to scheduling practices, fixed costs, and employee training made at the discretion of employers or by public mandate do not replace the need for a comprehensive safety net of supports for all people (Meyers & Gornick, 2009). For working poor families, the personal and community resources upon which many individuals draw to accommodate demands at work, however flexible, are often severely limited. Thus, in tandem with changes to private employer practices, public safety net policies and programs such as paid leaves and sick time still have an important role to play in delivering economic security to those laboring at the frontlines of firms.

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