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Working in the service sector in Connecticut

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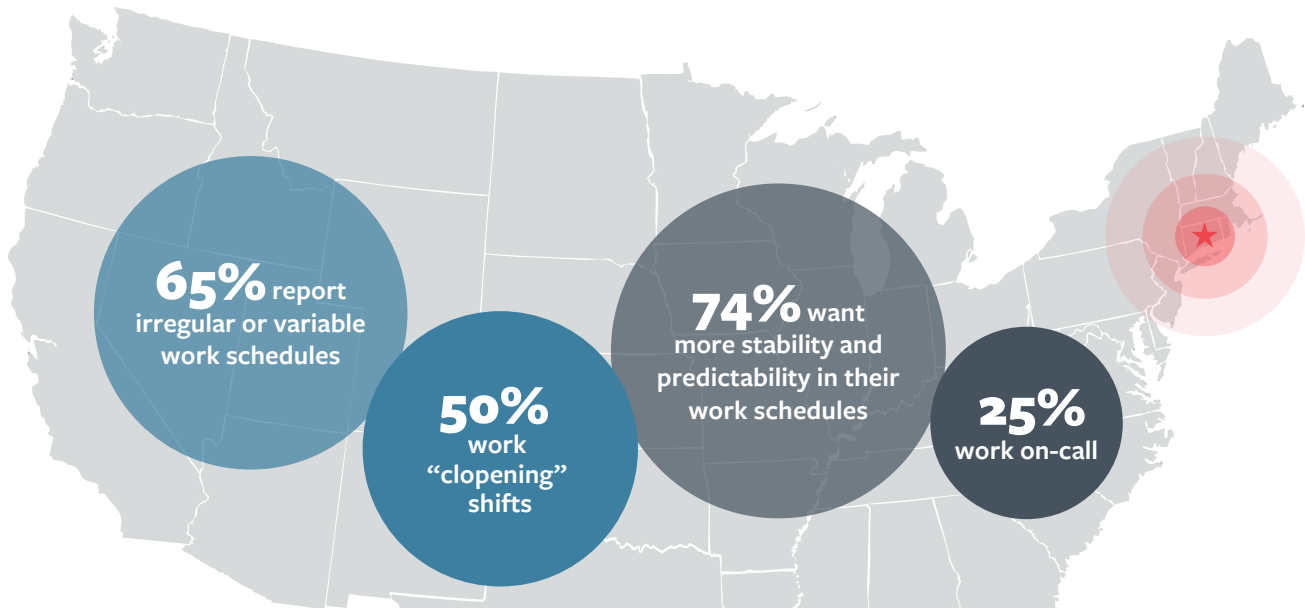
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# Working in the Service Sector in Connecticut



Nearly 250,000 workers are employed in the retail and food service sector in the state of Connecticut.<sup>1</sup> Nationally, jobs in the service sector are characterized by low pay and few fringe benefits, and workers employed in the service sector have little control over the days and times that they will work.<sup>2</sup> In addition, many service sector employers across the country rely on just-in-time and on-call scheduling practices designed to minimize labor costs by closely aligning staffing with consumer demand.<sup>3</sup> These practices can introduce a great deal of instability into the lives of workers and their families.<sup>4</sup>

This research brief is part of series designed to advance our understanding of work conditions in the service sector – in particular schedule instability and unpredictability – in cities and states across the country. The Shift Project is collecting survey data from workers employed at large chain retailers and food service establishments across the country.<sup>5</sup> We ask workers about their work schedules, household economic security, health, and wellbeing – allowing insight into workers’ work and family lives that is not available in other existing data.

The Shift Project data permit an unprecedented view of labor conditions for workers in Connecticut, employed at the large firms that are the focus of recent state and local labor regulation. This research brief describes the experiences reported by 438 service sector workers in Connecticut.

## Wages and Work Hours

For workers paid hourly, their earnings are determined by their hourly wage and number of scheduled hours. Many Connecticut workers reported wages and hours that fall short of what they would need to make ends meet. Connecticut service sector workers reported, on average, an hourly wage of \$12.40. For most workers, hourly wages fall substantially below estimates of a living wage, which is calculated based on what would be required to afford basic necessities assuming full-time year-round work. In Connecticut, the living wage for a single person with no children is estimated to be \$12.88 and for a single parent with one child is \$28.78 per hour.<sup>6</sup> Of note, these living wage estimates assume consistent full-time work, an

assumption that applies to only a small minority of Connecticut service sector workers.

In fact, 17% of Connecticut service sector workers usually work less than 20 hours per week. Another 31% usually work between 20 and less than 30 hours. Forty percent report working between 30 and less than 40 hours per week, and only 12% work at least 40 hours per week. Some suggest that workers may prefer this kind of part-time employment. We tested this explanation directly by asking workers whether they “would like to work more hours.” It is illuminating that 58% of Connecticut workers overall, and 64% among those working less than 30 hours per week, reported that they would like to work more hours.

## Unstable and Unpredictable Work Schedules

In addition to wide-spread part time hours, we also find that Connecticut workers experience unstable and unpredictable work schedules, along several dimensions.

Two-thirds of workers describe their work schedules as irregular or variable. Specifically, 43% report “variable” work schedules and 22% report “rotating” or “split shifts.” Another 13% of workers report regular, non-standard night or evening schedules. Only 19% of service sector workers report a regular daytime work schedule, and everyone else has either an irregular, unstable, or non-standard work schedule.

Connecticut workers also experience a great deal of variation in the number of hours worked each week. The average worker reported a gap of 13 hours between the week they worked the most hours and the week they worked the fewest hours over the past month. In percentage terms, that is almost a 37% gap between the hours worked in the week with the most hours and that with the fewest. Given our focus on hourly workers, these variations in hours will then lead automatically to volatility in earnings.

In addition to the common experience of schedule instability, most workers receive limited advanced notice of their work schedules. Just 44% of workers

receive more than 2 weeks advanced notice of their work schedules. Another 31% receive between 1 and 2 weeks’ notice. A quarter of workers receive less than 1 week of advanced notice and the vast majority of those, 18% of all workers, receive 4 days of notice or less.

Workers reported on experiencing specific types of schedule instability in the past month. Twenty-five percent of workers reported working an “on-call” work shift, meaning that they kept their schedule open and available for work but may or may not actually work the shift. Eleven percent of workers reported having a shift cancelled in the past month. Half of workers reported that they worked consecutive closing then opening shifts, referred to as “clopening.”

These measures show that many Connecticut service sector workers experience unstable and unpredictable work schedules. We also find that these workers often do not have control over their scheduled days and times of work. Forty-eight percent of workers have no input into their work schedules. Almost 37% have some input, and only 15% have a large degree of control over their scheduled work days and times.

In addition to asking about instances of schedule instability over the past month, we also asked workers whether they had to keep their schedule open and available for work. Strikingly, 66% of workers reported that they kept their schedule open and available for work. When workers are keeping their schedules open and available for work, this has implications for their ability to balance work and family responsibilities, to combine work with schooling or other pursuits, and to achieve a work/life balance.

This variability and lack of control is indicative of schedule instability and unpredictability. But, some would suggest that these experiences reflect workers’ own desires for schedule flexibility. We tested this explanation directly by asking workers whether they would “like to have a more stable and predictable work schedule.” The results are telling. The large majority of workers (74%) expressed a desire for more stability and predictability in their work schedules. This share was even higher among Connecticut workers who reported a variable schedule (83% of those workers)

or workers who reported working on-call shifts in the prior month (85% of those workers).

## Challenges reported by Connecticut Workers

The Shift survey also asked workers to report on whether their work schedules interfered with their family needs and caregiving responsibilities. These types of conflicts were common. Half of workers express that their work schedule does not provide enough flexibility for them to handle family needs. More than a quarter of workers say that their work schedule is a chronic source of extra stress for their family and almost three-quarters say that their work schedule sometimes, often, or always causes extra stress. Forty percent say that their work schedule always or often makes it hard to meet their caregiving responsibilities, and an even larger share (72%) experience conflicts between work and their caregiving responsibilities sometimes, often, or always.

Another consequence of unstable work hours is unstable earnings and accompanying financial challenges. A large share of workers (37%) report that their income changes from week to week, and 26% report that they have difficulty paying their bills.

## No Relief for Working Parents

One third of the Connecticut retail workers in our sample were living with children. These workers experienced little relief from the unstable and unpredictable schedules that we have shown are common in the industry. For instance, 49% of parents worked “clopings” (against 50% of non-parents), 10% had cancelled shifts (vs. 11%), and 19% worked on call (vs. 29%).

Children thrive in stable and high-quality child care arrangements.<sup>7</sup> But, on-call shifts, limited advanced notice, and generally unstable and unpredictable work schedules make arranging this type of care very difficult and these working parents often scramble to arrange a patchwork of care that involves multiple

caregivers and variable arrangements and rarely involves high-quality center-based childcare.<sup>8</sup>

We have explored the consequences of working an unstable and unpredictable work schedule for children’s child care arrangements in our national data.<sup>9</sup> We focus on the parents of young children age 0-4, early years that are crucial to healthy child development.<sup>10</sup> We find that children whose parents’ retail jobs involved “just-in-time scheduling” are significantly more likely to have three or more child care providers and to be cared for on a daily basis by older siblings. Parents exposed to this kind of scheduling report significantly more difficulty arranging for childcare and are also more likely to report having had to miss work because they could not arrange for childcare.

## Discussion

The Shift Project survey of service sector workers provides a window into the experiences of workers employed at large retail and food establishments across the nation and in particular locales. This brief describes the experiences of workers in Connecticut.

The portrait of Connecticut service sector workers reveals that unstable and unpredictable schedules are the norm. As we have seen nationally, the retail and food sectors in Connecticut are characterized by low pay, insufficient work hours, and a lack of control over scheduled work hours. With the new Shift Project data, we can see that these workers also contend with schedules that are announced with little notice and often changed at the last minute. By hearing directly from workers we can learn not only about their experiences, but about their preferences. The large majority of workers express a desire for more work hours and more predictability in their work schedules.

Scheduling practices are beginning to change, however, as some localities have passed labor laws that regulate work schedules. San Francisco and Seattle and New York and Oregon State have all passed legislation requiring a certain amount advance notice of work schedules (usually two weeks)

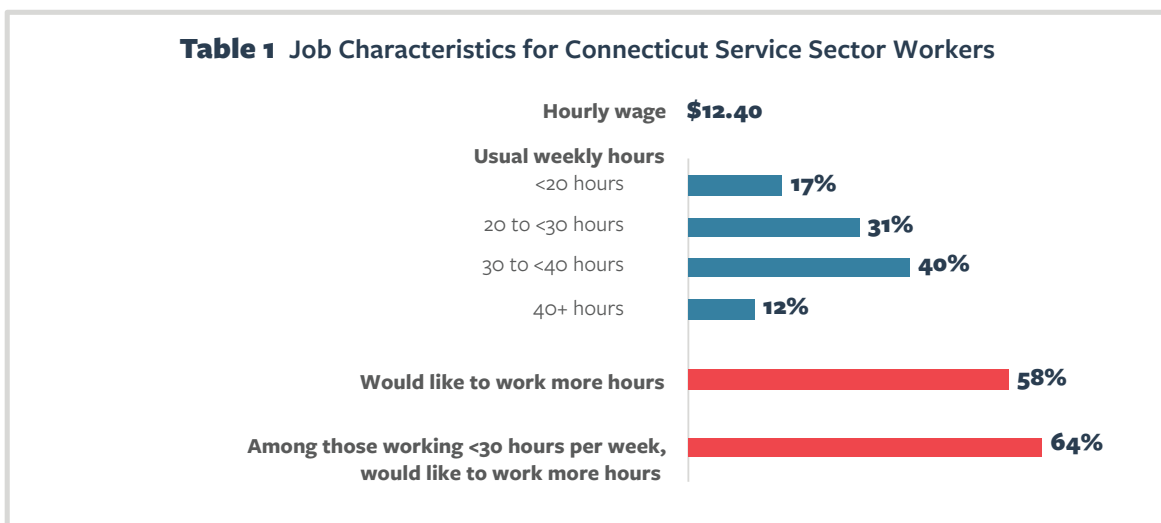
and stipulating that workers be compensated by employers when their shifts are changed on shorter notice. These new labor regulations also include an “access to hours” provision, requiring that employers offer additional hours to their part-time workers before hiring additional part-time employees.

Connecticut is also considering legislation to make work schedules more stable and predictable for workers, for instance, by discouraging on-call and clopening shifts. The findings from the Shift Project provide evidence that this type of legislation would have a major impact on the day-to-day lives of workers in the service sector in Connecticut and would be responsive to the desire of workers to have more predictability to their work schedules.

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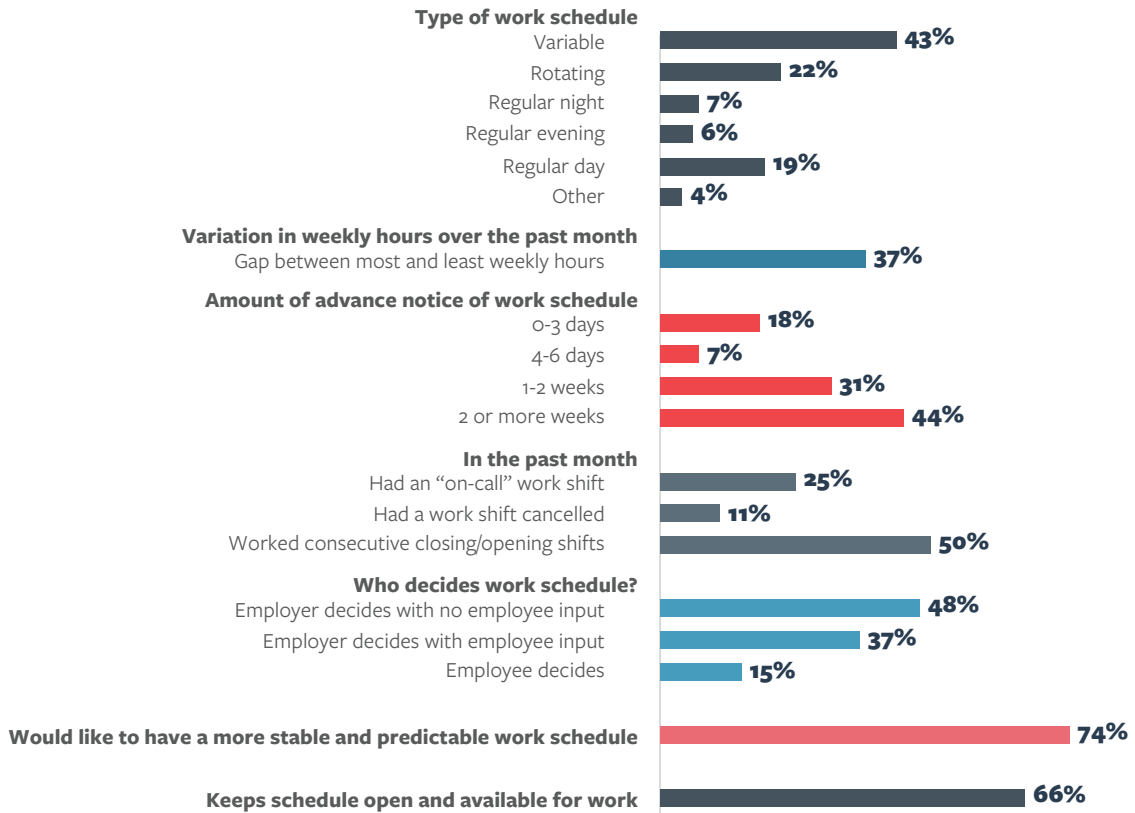
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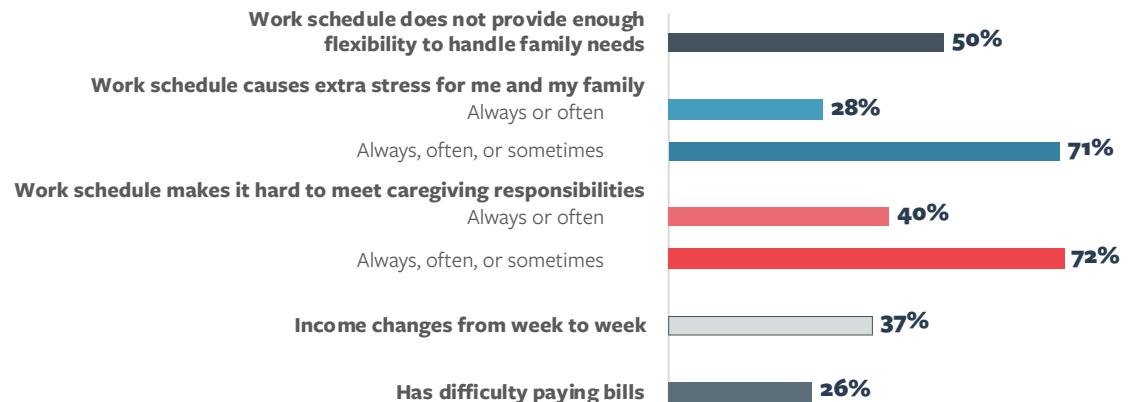
Source: SHIFT survey of 438 service sector workers

**Table 2** Work Schedule Characteristics for Connecticut Service Sector Workers



Source: SHIFT survey of 438 service sector workers

**Table 3** Challenges reported by Connecticut Service Sector Workers



Source: SHIFT survey of 438 service sector workers

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> [https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes\\_ct.htm#41-0000](https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes_ct.htm#41-0000)
- <sup>2</sup> Lambert, S. J. 2008. “Passing the Buck: Labor Flexibility Practices that Transfer Risk onto Hourly Workers.” *Human Relations* 61(9): 1203-1227.
- <sup>3</sup> Golden, L. 2015. “Irregular Work Scheduling and Its Consequences.” Briefing Paper #394. Economic Policy Institute; Appelbaum, E., A. Bernhardt, and R.J. Murnane. (Eds.). 2003. *Low-Wage America: How Employers are Reshaping Opportunity in the Workplace*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation; Clawson, D., and N. Gerstel. 2015. *Unequal Time: Gender, Class, and Family in Employment Schedules*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- <sup>4</sup> Lambert, S.J., P. Fugiel, and J.R. Henly. 2014. *Precarious Work Schedules among Early-Career Employees in the US: A National Snapshot*. University of Chicago.
- <sup>5</sup> Further details about our data collection and methodology are presented in an Appendix at the end of this brief.
- <sup>6</sup> The Living Wage Calculator, created by Dr. Amy K. Glasmeier, Professor of Economic Geography and Regional Planning at MIT.
- <sup>7</sup> Sandstrom, H., & Huerta, S. 2013. *The Negative Effects of Instability on Child Development: A Research Synthesis*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute; Burchinal, M., Magnuson, K., Powell, D., & Hong, S. S. 2015. “Early Childcare and Education.” In R. M. Lerner, M. H. Bornstein, & T. Leventhal (Eds.), *Handbook of Child Psychology and Developmental Science: Ecological Settings and Processes*. Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- <sup>8</sup> Carillo, D., K. Harknett, A. Logan, S. Luhr, and D. Schneider. 2017. “Instability of Work and Care: How Work Schedules Shape Child-Care Arrangements for Parents Working in the Service Sector.” *Social Service Review* 91(3): 422-455.
- <sup>9</sup> We use multiple regression models to estimate the relationship between exposure to “just-in-time scheduling” (a scale variable ranging from 0 (did not work on call, did not have a last minute shift change, had > 4 days advance notice) to 3 (experienced all three scheduling practices)) and (1) child care multiplicity, (2) use of sibling care, (3) difficulty arranging care, and (4) missing work due to lack of care. We control for parental gender, relationship status, race/ethnicity, educational attainment, school enrollment, number of children in the household, household income, household financial insecurity, job tenure, usual hours, and managerial position.
- <sup>10</sup> Heckman, J. 2006. “Skill Formation and the Economics of Investing in Disadvantaged Children.” *Science* 312: 1900-1902

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## Methodological Appendix

The Shift Project collected survey data from over 50,000 service sector workers employed at large retail and food establishments across the country between August of 2016 and November of 2017. This brief focused on a subsample of 438 service sector workers in the state of Connecticut who completed Shift Project surveys.

The Shift Project survey recruits survey respondents using online Facebook advertisements, targeted to workers employed at large retail and food service employers. A key advantage of this sampling approach is that we purposefully capture workers who will be covered by scheduling ordinances, which apply to large retail and food employers and exempt smaller establishments. By targeting our data collection to these large establishments, the workers in our survey sample are precisely those that would be affected by a scheduling ordinance like the ones recently passed in New York City, Seattle, and the states of New York and Oregon.

Those who responded to the Shift Project survey invitation were automatically routed to a survey landing page where they were asked to consent to participate in the study, then began the online self-administered survey using the Qualtrics platform. As an incentive, those who completed the survey and provided contact information were entered into a lottery for an Apple iPad. The survey included modules on job characteristics, work schedules, demographics, economic stability, health, parenting, and child outcomes. To screen out invalid survey responses, we used an attention filter (a question that instructed respondents to select a particular response category to verify the accuracy of their responses) as well as a speed filter (discarding data for surveys that were completed too hastily). To address occasional missing data owing to item non-response, we use multiple imputation.

In the descriptive results we present in this brief, we have applied weights that adjust our sample to reflect the universe of service sector workers in the State of Connecticut. These weights are constructed in two stages. First, we construct survey weights to adjust the demographic characteristics of the Connecticut Shift survey sample to match the demographic characteristics of Connecticut service sector workers in American Community Survey (ACS) for the years 2011-2015. We align the ACS sample with the Shift sample by selecting workers in the ACS who are employed in the same occupations and industries as the Shift sample and report that their place of work is within the state of Connecticut.

Second, to ensure that our sample accurately reflects the distribution of employment types among large retail and food service employers in Connecticut, we use data from the Reference USA database of U.S. establishments. The RefUSA database contains a detailed listing of all retail and food establishments nationally and allows us to pinpoint establishments within Connecticut. RefUSA contains the size of the workforce for each establishment, which we aggregate up to the industry level. Then, using the aggregated RefUSA industry data for Connecticut, we weight our Shift survey sample to match the distribution of retail apparel, food service, grocery, and other industries in Connecticut. All of the descriptive results we present in this report apply these ACS demographic and RefUSA industry weights.

A detailed discussion of the Shift Project data collection, methodology, and data validation is available in a working paper, “What’s Not to Like? Facebook as a Tool for Survey Data Collection”, available by request from [djschneider@berkeley.edu](mailto:djschneider@berkeley.edu).