The Shift-Work Shuffle: Flexibility and Instability for Chicago’s Fast Food Workforce

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Acknowledgements

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About the Labor Education Program and the Project for Middle Class Renewal

www.illinoislabored.org

The Labor Education Program (LEP) of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign strongly believes that education plays an important role in helping every American worker realize the promise of economic opportunity. Established in 1947, LEP serves as a state wide educational and research program with offices in both Champaign and Chicago. Through extension programming and non-credit classes, LEP educates over 2,000 workers statewide on an annual basis. LEP faculty and staff also organize conferences and seminars related to current issues facing workers as well as produce applied and academic research products focused on unions and unionized workers, changes in the economy and labor markets, and the low-wage workforce. In 2015, LEP began the Project for Middle Class Renewal to support research on employment issues and to develop education programs on worker rights.

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Cover photo source: Flickr user Miguel Vaca
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Fast food workers in Chicago suffer from the uncertainty of not knowing how many hours they will work in any given week and the lack of autonomy to voice their concerns without fear of reprisal. Unstable schedules lead to tangible income insecurity and the inability for workers to obtain supplemental employment or even attend schooling to improve their job prospects.

This report, The Shift-Work Shuffle: Flexibility and Instability for Chicago’s Chicago Fast Food Workforce conducted by researchers at the Project for Middle Class Renewal in the School for Labor and Employment Relations at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign addresses the elements and impacts of irregular scheduling in Chicago’s fast food industry. Notable findings from a survey of 230 fast food workers in Chicago include:

- Survey respondents worked an average of 26.9 hours in the week before they took the survey. Despite over 40 percent of surveyed workers reporting they work full-time hours, only about 16 percent actually worked more than 35 hours.

- Approximately 45 percent of survey respondents reported that their weekly hours are limited to an average of a little less than 32 hours per week. Over 70 percent of workers claimed to not be guaranteed to work a minimum number of hours per week.

- Surveyed respondents not only reported working on average less than full-time hours, they also experienced significant variability in the weekly hours that they worked. When asked to indicate the maximum and minimum number of hours they had worked in the proceeding 90 days, fast food workers revealed a large differential in their access to paid labor. Maximum and minimum work hours fluctuated by as much as 10-14 hours a week for nearly 25 percent of employees, and by 15-19 hours for another 18 percent.

- Almost one quarter of survey respondents report that they always have changes made to their work schedules after they have already been posted. Another 27 percent of surveyed workers sometimes have changes made to their schedules after they are posted.
• Despite the fact that over 87 percent of surveyed workers report they were not hired as on-call workers, 43 percent of all respondents are required to work on-call.

• Roughly 28 percent of surveyed fast food workers regularly work back-to-back or “clopening” shifts.

• Almost one third of survey respondents receive notice of their work schedules less than one day before they start. An additional 16 percent of workers get notice of their work schedules less than one week before they start, and just over 39 percent of respondents get notice of their schedules one week before they start. Only 6 percent of surveyed workers maintain a set work schedule.

As detailed in the study, scheduling concerns also result in considerable negative effects for the families of workers. Not only do family members suffer from the impact of unpredictable wages, they also may be directly impacted by the lack of consistent and reliable childcare.

• More than two-thirds of surveyed workers report that their work schedules often or sometimes interfere with their family and home lives.

• An additional two-thirds of respondents claim that having an unpredictable work schedule results in having issues with paying their bills.

• Over 40 percent of sampled workers feel that their variable schedules cause issues in parenting and childcare.

• Roughly 63 percent of workers believe that scheduling issues result in personal negative health impacts.

Variable scheduling practices produce quantifiable instability for low-wage workers and low-income communities. In contrast to the popular notion that fast food work consists of short-term jobs staffed by teenagers, Chicago fast food workers are primarily poor working adults and single mothers of color, working long tenures in the industry.

• The majority of surveyed workers were adults, women of color, and single parents.

• The average tenure of employment at surveyed workers’ current employers was over four years.
The findings from the Chicago fast food workers’ survey demonstrate a need for the implementation of the following eight policies to help transform employment in the fast food industry into a stable middle class occupation.

1. Employees should be provided with preferably two weeks but no less than one-week notification of their work schedules.

2. Employees should be provided with the opportunity to work a more standard, less fluctuating schedule.

3. A seniority system should be utilized to allow workers to work additional hours before new employees are given more hours.

4. If employees report to work they should be compensated for the hours they were scheduled but did not work because they were directed to sign out before the shift ended.

5. Employees should be free to request changes in their work schedules, including indicating days available to work and not available to work without fear of reprisal.

6. Employees who are not hired as “on-call” employees should be able to refuse to work on an “on-call” basis without fear of reprisal.

7. Employees who are required to be “on-call” but are subsequently not called out to work should be compensated for their on-call time.

8. The practice of “clopening” should be discontinued.
INTRODUCTION

In recent years much attention has been given to the inadequate minimum wages being paid service-sector workers such as those employed in the fast-food industry. While the minimum wage increase won in late 2014 was viewed as a victory for Chicago workers, other obstacles to secure livelihoods such as variable scheduling continue to dominate industry practices. Despite tangible wage increases Chicago fast-food workers are still living in poverty and still lacking the resources necessary to improve their employment prospects.

For the first time a comprehensive study of the flexible scheduling practices in Chicago fast-food restaurants (The Shift-Work Shuffle: Flexibility and Instability for Chicago’s Chicago Fast Food Workforce) has been conducted to better understand the impact of variability and inconsistency for local fast-food employees. The timing of this research is of particular importance given Mayor Emanuel’s formation of and commitment to the Mayor’s Task Force on Working Families and its’ Fair Scheduling Subcommittee\(^1\). This report attempts to address many of the unknown variables discussed by the Fair Scheduling Subcommittee, such as the prevalence of on-call scheduling, the volatility in hours for low-wage workers, and the impacts of this variability on workers’ lives.

Scheduling concerns that were measured in this study include the limits on the number of hours employees can work, the usage of on-call scheduling, and the prevalence of the practice of “clopening” or working back-to-back shifts. Other scheduling-related issues that were examined were the limited notice given to employees when changes were made in their shifts and their lack of autonomy in voicing scheduling issues or taking time off. Finally, workers were asked to estimate the impacts of their variable work schedules on their families, their health, and their ability to attend school.

Results from worker surveys indicate that scheduling hardships for Chicago fast-food workers are both numerous and widespread across varied employers, geographic differences, and demographic distinctions between workers. Clearly, raising the minimum wage rate is not enough of a policy fix to improve the lives of low-wage workers in Chicago. As is discussed in the Recommendations section at the end of this report, a number of tangible steps could be taken by the City of Chicago to better regulate overused and abused variable scheduling practices in low-wage businesses such as fast-food restaurants. Such public policies would serve to promote increased stability in the lives of Chicago’s low-wage workers.
and produce positive impacts for both Chicago families and local communities.

Source: Fight for 15 Chicago
Review of Previous Research

In their recent book, *Unequal Time: Gender, Class, and Family in Employment Schedules*, Dan Clausen and Naomi Gerstel argue that “...the control of time is one of the most pervasive – and most unrecognized – issues in our society,” (2014, 268). Yet, both scholarly and applied research has largely focused on monetary compensation in the form of wages and benefits rather than workers’ schedules. This is beginning to change. As the service sector becomes the foundation of the U.S. economy, the impact of the work is becoming more prevalent among workers and their families. In response, researchers are broadening their focus to examine how employers use “time” as a means of control in the workplace.

For example, a 2011 study (Kelly et al) of white collar workers at Best Buy’s headquarters uses longitudinal data to examine how work/life balance was impacted before and after the implementation of the Results Only Work Environment (ROWE), an initiative of Best Buy that is meant to offer more employee control over their schedule. Arguing that “...previous research relies almost exclusively on cross-sectional data, studies have not demonstrated that work-family conflicts can be reduced by changing work conditions, nor have scholars evaluated which workplace changes are most promising,” (266). The authors conclude that increased employee control over work time is “an important mechanism for
alleviating work/family conflicts." This research builds on earlier research that focuses on access to flexible work schedules for professionals and managers (Davis and Kalleberg 2006; Deitch and Huffman 2001).

More recent studies have begun to turn their attention to the impact of schedule flexibility on low-wage workers. (Lambert 2008; Swanberg et al 2008; Lambert 2009; Hammer et al 2011) In their 2006 study of a Chicago retail site, Henly et al surveyed 54 women workers with young children in an effort to understand the personal and policy impacts of employer driven scheduling in the service sector. The retail industry “has a disproportionate share of nonstandard schedule jobs” that raises significant issues of work/family balance as well as issues within the social welfare field, according to their research. Of particular interest to Henly et al was to understand how “…the process by which schedules are set, negotiated, and changed,” (612). Based on their research, the analysis “…suggests that employers’ motivation to maintain a flexible workforce is evidenced in the ways that they screen new hires, in the manner by which schedules are set, and in the frequent staffing adjustments that are made even after schedules have been posted.” (612). Despite efforts at employee-driven scheduling to help differ increased work/family conflict, their conclusion is the relevance and importance of a policy shift “…through broader social policy changes that help families cope with economic instabilities, through direct modifications of employer practices, or through reforms of the child-care sector,” (631).

Similarly, Lambert et al’s study of schedule flexibility in hourly jobs deconstructs how extending conventional models of flexibility that are typically used among white collar workers to hourly jobs is problematic. Using census data along with comparative case studies, they “…explain how conventional flexibility options do not always map well onto hourly jobs, and in certain instances may disadvantage workers by undermining their ability to earn an adequate living,” (Lambert et al 2012, 293).

A series of recent applied research studies have illustrated in detail the impact of irregular work scheduling. In April 2015, the Economic Policy Institute published a study that detailed the practice of irregular work scheduling and its impact – in particular the impact on work/family conflicts that negatively influence the health of society as a whole. In addition to volumes of data, their report cites the top research in the field including Lambert et al’s recent study using the National Longitudinal Study of Youth (NLSY) panel data (of relatively younger workers) that uncovers which specific workers’ characteristics, industry and occupation, are associated with the most advance notice of schedule, schedule control, and fluctuations in weekly hours (Lambert et al, 2014). In addition,
a recent study of retail workers in and around New York City finds that only 40 percent of such employees have a minimum number of hours set per week (Luce, Hammad, and Sipe 2014).

Another set of recent publications turns their attention to models of scheduling that involve employee-input. In a recent 2014 policy brief, the Center for Law and Social Policy, Retail Action Project, and Women Employed offer series of case studies that demonstrate how employees are able to have a stronger role in scheduling and still maintain a strong competitive edge in the marketplace. These studies include examples of non-union and union workplaces as well as a cooperative home health care business. And, finally, a recent Russell Sage publication offers an in-depth study of strategies and policies that need to be considered for responding to practices such as employer-driven flexible schedules (Luce et al 2014).

Source: Fight for 15 Chicago
Industry Overview

The U.S. Census Bureau characterizes the fast food/quick service industry as limited-service establishments that are primarily engaged in providing food services (except snack and nonalcoholic beverage bars) where patrons generally order or select items and pay before eating\(^2\). There exist upwards of 225,000 limited-service restaurants employing almost 3.59 million workers in the United States (U.S. Census 2012). Sales from these restaurants grossed over $185 billion in 2012. The Chicago fast food industry consists of roughly 2,200 establishments. These restaurants employ over 27,000 workers and gross more than $1.7 billion in sales annually.

Fast-food restaurant companies are both corporately-held as well as owned and operated by franchises. For example, more than 80 percent of McDonald’s restaurants worldwide are owned and operated by independent business owners (McDonald’s 2015). In August 2015, the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) ruled that a company that hires a contractor to staff its facilities may be considered a joint employer of the workers at that facility (NLRB 2015). This signifies that any union representing the fast-food workers would be legally entitled to bargain with the parent company, not just the franchisee, under federal labor law.

To date, no fast-food restaurant in the U.S. has been unionized and so this ruling has yet to be tested. Regarding the Board’s decision, James P. Hoffa, general president of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, who brought the complaint, stated, “This decision will make a tremendous difference for workers’ rights on the job. Employers will no longer be able to shift responsibility for their workers and hide behind loopholes to prevent workers from organizing or engaging in collective bargaining,” (Scheiber et al 2015).

Another industry-wide development is the movement towards on-call and other variable scheduling practices. In recent years, use of employee scheduling software has become a dominant trend in the fast-food and chain retail industries. Scheduling programs allow corporations to fluctuate their staffing levels in correspondence with the ebbs and flows of customer traffic in any given day or week (Greenhouse 2012). Use of scheduling software has revolutionized the process of assigning staff to shifts and can be very profitable for employers. Such practices increase the probability that companies never have too many people or not enough people working at any given time.
However, usage of variable scheduling practices can have detrimental impacts on employees. Such trends as breaking up shifts with unpaid hours in the middle or the phenomenon of “clopening,” which occurs when employees are responsible for closing their store and then returning often less than eight hours later to open the store, can produce a wide range of hardships for affected workers. Workers who are also given very little notice of an inconsistent work schedule changing from week to week may find it difficult to balance work and family life. Additionally, changes in scheduling practices have resulted in employees learning that their scheduled work hours are cancelled on short notice, sometimes even after they have arrived to start their shifts. Along with the negative impacts of specific forms of irregular and unstable scheduling is the corresponding inadequate number of weekly hours made available for fast food and retail employees to work. In addition to the impacts of irregular scheduling, being assigned a small number of work hours results in very low annual incomes for workers in one of the fastest growing sectors in Illinois (Illinois Department of Employment Security 2015).

**Methodology**

The Shift-Work Shuffle: Flexibility and Instability for Chicago’s Chicago Fast Food Workforce study includes findings from a 58-item survey of 230 fast-food workers employed in the City of Chicago. The survey tool was in large part adapted from a survey of retail workers in New York (Luce et al 2014). In order to qualify for participation in the study, all workers had to have worked in a fast-food restaurant in Chicago sometime during the seven days prior to the survey.

Survey respondents participated by either answering an oral questionnaire administered by trained survey interviewers or by filling out a written questionnaire. The surveys were conducted in both Spanish and English, which represent the primary languages spoken by fast-food workers in Chicago. Roughly 29 percent of surveys were conducted in Spanish. Workers were solicited for participation in the study as they were leaving their worksites at the end of their shift. All surveys
were conducted between August and October of 2015.

The 230 workers included in this study represent a statistically significant sample size of the total workforce employed in the fast-food industry in the City of Chicago. Collectively, these workers were employed in 93 separate fast-food restaurant locations. These restaurants were located in 38 of 50 Chicago wards, as can be seen in Figure 1.

Roughly 58 percent of survey respondents worked at McDonald’s at the time the survey was conducted. The remaining workers were employed at Burger King (12 percent), Taco Bell (10 percent), Kentucky Fried Chicken (4 percent), Dunkin Donuts (4 percent), Starbucks (1 percent), Wendy’s (1 percent), and an assortment of other smaller fast-food restaurants encompassing the work experiences of another 10 percent of survey respondents.

Source: Flickr user Dean Hochman
Figure 1: Map of Surveyed Fast Food Restaurants and Worker Addresses

Location of Respondents and Fast Food Restaurants within Chicago Wards

- **Respondent's Approximate Address**
- **Fast Food Restaurant Employing Respondent(s)**

Sources:
City of Chicago Data Portal. "Wards_2015.shp".
City of Chicago Data Portal. "Hydro.shp".
City of Chicago Data Portal. "City_Boundary.shp".

Projection: NAD 1983 State Plane Illinois East FIPS 1201 Feet
FINDINGS

Worker Characteristics
As can be seen in Figure 2, women adults of color predominantly staff the fast-food industry in Chicago. Over two-thirds of workers who contributed survey responses were women. The average age among survey respondents was 31 years old, and almost a quarter of respondents were aged 40 years or older. Roughly 55 percent of surveyed workers considered themselves Black or African-American, while 44 percent characterized themselves Latino/a or Hispanic.

Figure 2:
Gender, country of origin, race/ethnicity, and parental status of surveyed workers

Source: Authors’ analysis of 2015 Chicago Fast Food Worker Study

Roughly 62 percent of respondents report being born in the United States and 28 percent of workers claim Mexico as their birthplace. The average year of immigration to the United States for foreign-born respondents was 1999.

A solid majority (62 percent) of surveyed fast-food workers were parents. Among parents, almost two-thirds of respondents reported they were caring for their dependents without the support of a partner.
Additionally, a large majority of surveyed fast-food workers relied on public assistance for survival (Figure 3). Almost 63 percent of respondents received Medicaid/Medicare while 47 percent of surveyed workers receive SNAP/food stamp benefits. Only 12 percent of survey respondents receive health insurance though their primary employer.

Surveyed workers possessed relatively low educational attainment. Approximately 49 percent of respondents had a high school degree or completed an equivalency program, while fewer than 27 percent of surveyed workers had less than a high school degree.

Over 98 percent of surveyed workers currently live in the City of Chicago.

Figure 3:
Public subsidy usage, educational attainment, and Chicago residency of surveyed workers

Source: Authors’ analysis of 2015 Chicago Fast Food Worker Study
Workplace Basics

The average start date for surveyed workers at their current place of employment was May 2011, representing average employment tenure of over four and a half years. The median length of employment at the current job was roughly a year and a half. Figure 4 displays the year of initial hire at surveyed workers’ current fast food restaurant. Almost two-thirds of surveyed workers maintained between one and two years of employment at their current employer at the time of the survey. Another 28 percent had over five years of tenure at their fast-food location.

Figure 4:  
Year of initial hire of surveyed workers

Source: Authors’ analysis of 2015 Chicago Fast Food Worker Study

Figure 5 shows the different fast food locations that employed survey respondents. The vast majority (58 percent), worked at McDonald’s at the time they participated in the survey project.
Survey respondents worked a variety of positions within their places of employment, though over 50 percent combined worked as cashiers and grill cooks. Figure 6 displays the primary occupations of surveyed workers.

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1 A primary occupation is one that is the position in which the respondent worked the most hours in the seven days prior to their participation to the survey project.
Nationally, the median hourly wage of fast-food food preparation and operations workers is $8.78 an hour (BLS 2015). The median national hourly wage for fast-food cooks is slightly higher at $8.90 an hour. In Chicago, the average hourly wage of all surveyed workers was just above the City of Chicago minimum wage at $10.20 an hour.

In the seven days prior to their participation in the survey project, survey respondents worked an average of 26.9 hours. Despite over 40 percent of surveyed workers reporting they work full-time hours, only about 16 percent actually worked more than 35 hours in the seven days prior to taking the survey. In fact, almost half of respondents worked less than 26.9 hours in the previous week. Among the roughly 60 percent of surveyed workers who claimed to be classified as part-time employees, almost 75 percent would like to work full-time hours.

At a wage rate of $10.20 per hour, a worker who works an average of 26.9 hours a week for 50 weeks a year would earn an annual gross salary of roughly $13,719. This is almost half the annual income needed to meet the yearly federal poverty line for a family of four. Even taking into account a smaller household size of two persons, since almost two-thirds of surveyed
workers were single parents, the average annual gross salary of these fast food workers was considerably below the yearly federal poverty line income of $15,930.

As can be seen in Table 1, approximately 45 percent of survey respondents reported that their weekly hours are limited to an average of a little less than 32 hours per week. Over 70 percent of workers claimed to not be guaranteed to work a minimum number of hours per week. Despite these limitations, only 16 percent of survey respondents maintained a second job at the time of their completion of the survey. An additional 46 percent of respondents claimed that having an unpredictable schedule makes it difficult for them to obtain other employment.

Table 1:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Limited Hours</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not guaranteed to work a minimum number of hours per week</td>
<td>70.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly hours are limited to less than 32 hours</td>
<td>45.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time workers who want to work full-time</td>
<td>74.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work a second job</td>
<td>16.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Authors' analysis of 2015 Chicago Fast Food Worker Study

Surveyed respondents not only reported working on average less than full-time hours, they also experienced significantly variability in the weekly hours that they worked. When asked to indicate the maximum and minimum number of hours they had worked in the proceeding 90 days, fast food workers revealed a large differential in their access to paid labor. Maximum and minimum work hours fluctuated by as much as 10-14 hours a week for nearly 25 percent of employees, and by 15-19 hours for another 18 percent. One-quarter of respondents saw their maximum and minimum work time vary by 5 or less hours (Figure 7). While the reasons for such wide disparities in weekly hours worked was not known, surveyed workers expressed a strong interest in accumulating longer hours. The degree of difference in the weekly hours that so many respondents work is substantial and contributes to the precarious nature of employment in the fast food industry.
Figure 7:
Variability between the maximum and minimum number of weekly hours in the past 90 days

Source: Authors’ analysis of 2015 Chicago Fast Food Worker Study

Scheduling Concerns

Schedules are variable and change often
Table 2 displays some of the scheduling concerns identified by survey respondents.

Almost one quarter of survey respondents report that they always have changes made to their work schedules after they have already been posted. Another 27 percent of surveyed workers sometimes have changes made to their schedules after they are posted. The remaining 48 percent did not report changes to their schedule.

"My hours are very unpredictable. Sometimes they change my work schedule in the middle of the week. Other times I'm taken completely off the schedule or added to the schedule and I don't know it. They can change my hours at any time, and it's my responsibility to find out whether or not I'm scheduled."

- Douglas Hunter
Despite the fact that over 87 percent of surveyed workers report they were not hired as on-call workers, 43 percent of all respondents are required to work on-call.

Roughly 28 percent of surveyed fast food workers regularly work back-to-back or “clopening” shifts. Among these workers, 38 percent have less than seven hours between shifts to rest; 27 percent have only eight hours between both shifts; 14 percent have nine hours between shifts; and 11 percent have 10 hours between the two shifts.

Table 2:

**VARIABLE SCHEDULES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>52.0%</td>
<td>Have had changes made to their schedules after they are posted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42.9%</td>
<td>Work on-call</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27.7%</td>
<td>Work back-to-back/&quot;clopening&quot; shifts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52.6%</td>
<td>Sent home early before the end of their shift in the past 7 days</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Authors’ analysis of 2015 Chicago Fast Food Worker Study

Almost 43 percent of surveyed workers are scheduled for on-call shifts where they have to call their workplaces at a prescribed time to see if they are needed for work that day. Close to one third of survey respondents have to call their workplaces in the hour before an on-call shift to see if they are needed for work. Another 29 percent of surveyed workers have to call in two hours before scheduled on-call shifts to see if they are needed.

In the seven days prior to their participation in the survey project, 53 percent of respondents were sent home early before the completion of their scheduled shift. Less than 3 percent of these workers were paid for their unworked yet scheduled hours.

Surveyed workers also report receiving short and inconvenient notice of their scheduled shifts (Table 3). Almost one third of survey respondents receive notice of their work schedules less than one day before they start. An additional 16 percent of workers get notice of their work schedules less than one week before they start, and just over 39 percent of respondents get notice of their schedules one week before they start. Only 6 percent of surveyed workers maintain a set work schedule.
Table 3: NOTICING CONCERNS WITH SCHEDULES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>29.1%</td>
<td>Receive notice of schedule less than one day before work starts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>84.6%</td>
<td>Receive notice of schedule one week or less before work starts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2%</td>
<td>Have a set work schedule</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43.6%</td>
<td>Have to physically go into their workplaces to retrieve their schedules</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Authors’ analysis of 2015 Chicago Fast Food Worker Study

The overwhelming majority of survey respondents (87 percent) have their work schedules posted in their workplaces. Roughly 44 percent of surveyed workers are required to physically go into their restaurants to retrieve their schedules.

**Workers do not have flexibility in their schedules**

As is shown in Table 4, almost half of the fast food workers who participated in this survey reported that they get penalized for taking time off from their job. Over 50 percent of survey respondents are not able to request changes to their schedules after they have been assigned without penalty. Over 34 percent of surveyed workers are required to swap their shifts with coworkers if they are unable to work due to health reasons.

Approximately 43 percent of respondents are not able to specify which days and shifts they are able or unable to work. About half of the workers surveyed for this project are expected to maintain availability to work without guarantee of a work shift being assigned.

“When it comes to shifts and hours of safety, they're not flexible at all. I've worked ‘on call’ shifts and back to back shifts. I've been asked to work at the last minute and was threatened with a write up, if I didn't agree to work. There's no consistent scheduling.”

-Ke'Jioun Johnson
Table 4:
**INFLEXIBLE WORK SCHEDULES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>46.8%</td>
<td>Get penalized for taking time off from their job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50.2%</td>
<td>Are not able to request changes to their schedules after they have been assigned without penalty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34.2%</td>
<td>Are required to swap their shifts with coworkers if they are unable to work due to health reasons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43.2%</td>
<td>Are not able to specify which days and shifts they are able or unable to work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49.6%</td>
<td>Are expected to maintain availability to work without a guarantee of a work shift</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Authors’ analysis of 2015 Chicago Fast Food Worker Study

**Work/life in-balance**

Table 5 shows the considerable impacts that unpredictable schedules cause for surveyed fast-food workers. More than two-thirds of surveyed workers report that their work schedules often or sometimes interfere with their family and home lives. An additional two-thirds of respondents claim that having an unpredictable work schedule results in having issues with paying their bills.

Over 40 percent of sampled workers feel that their variable schedules cause issues in parenting and childcare.

Roughly 63 percent of workers believe that scheduling issues result in personal negative health impacts.

Almost one-fifth of respondents are currently in school. Among those workers, over 72 percent have been unable to attend class at some point because of their unpredictable work schedules.

"It's hard when my schedule is all over the place. I can't attend to my daughter’s school needs, prepare her for college, travel with her to visit different schools or help pay for her entrance exam fees. I can't even drop her off at school everyday like I want to."

-Doug Hunter
Table 5:

**AFFECTS OF WORK SCHEDULES ON HOME LIVES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>66.3%</td>
<td>Unpredictable work schedules interfere with their family and home lives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65.5%</td>
<td>Unpredictable work schedules cause issues in paying bills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42.5%</td>
<td>Unpredictable work schedules cause issues with childcare or parenting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>63.6%</td>
<td>Unpredictable work schedules cause negative health impacts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>72.4%</td>
<td>Unpredictable work schedules cause students to miss classes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Authors’ analysis of 2015 Chicago Fast Food Worker Study

**CONCLUSIONS**

Clearly, trends such as “on-call” scheduling and variable weekly hours serve maximum benefit to the employers who adopt these practices. Fast-food restaurants are able to modify their staffing needs quickly in response to changes in weather, public events or local competition. On the flip side, workers suffer from the uncertainty of not knowing how many hours they will work in any given week and the lack of autonomy to voice their concerns without fear of reprisal. This uncertainty leads to tangible income insecurity and the inability for workers to obtain supplemental employment or even attend schooling to improve their job prospects.

Scheduling concerns also result in considerable negative effects for the families of workers. Not only do family members suffer from the impact of variable wages, they also may be directly impacted by the lack of consistent and reliable childcare. As can be discerned from the findings of this survey project, Chicago fast-food workers, who are also disproportionately single parents, have a difficult time navigating childcare responsibilities due to the ever-changing demands of their work schedules.

Variable scheduling practices produce quantifiable instability for low-wage workers and low-income communities. The needs and goals of fast-
food employers must be taken into account when addressing the business hardships associated with ever-changing fluctuations in demand. However, industry needs and goals must be balanced by the experiences of the people who staff these businesses, the overwhelming majority of whom are long-time residents of the City of Chicago.

Source: Fight for 15 Chicago
RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings from the Chicago fast food employees' survey demonstrate a need for the implementation of the following eight policies to help transform employment in the fast food industry into a stable middle class occupation.

1. Employees should be provided with preferably two weeks but no less than one week notification of their work schedules.

2. Employees should be provided with the opportunity to work a more standard, less fluctuating schedule.

3. A seniority system should be utilized to allow workers to work additional hours before new employees are given more hours.

4. If employees report to work they should be compensated for the hours they were scheduled but did not work because they were directed to sign out before the shift ended.

5. Employees should be free to request changes in their work schedules, including indicating days available to work and not available to work without fear of reprisal.

6. Employees who are not hired as “on-call” employees should be able to refuse to work on an “on-call” basis without fear of reprisal.

7. Employees who are required to be “on-call” but are subsequently not called out to work should be compensated for their on-call time.

8. The practice of “clopening” should be discontinued.
ENDNOTES

1 Mayor Emanuel’s Task Force on Working Families was convened in June 2015 to develop a list of recommendations for the administration on three principal policy issues: earned sick time, scheduling practices, and additional family leave. The Task Force is comprised of representatives from the Chicago business community, worker advocacy organizations, and the University of Illinois Labor Education Program.

2 Limited-service restaurants are classified under the NAICS code 722513.

3 All survey interviewers underwent extensive training conducted by the staff at the Labor Education Program in the methods and protocols associated with social science survey research.

4 This sample size is statistically significant at 95% confidence level with a confidence interval of 6.

REFERENCES


Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP), Retail Action Project (RAP), and Women Employed. 2014. Tackling Unstable and Unpredictable Work Schedules.


