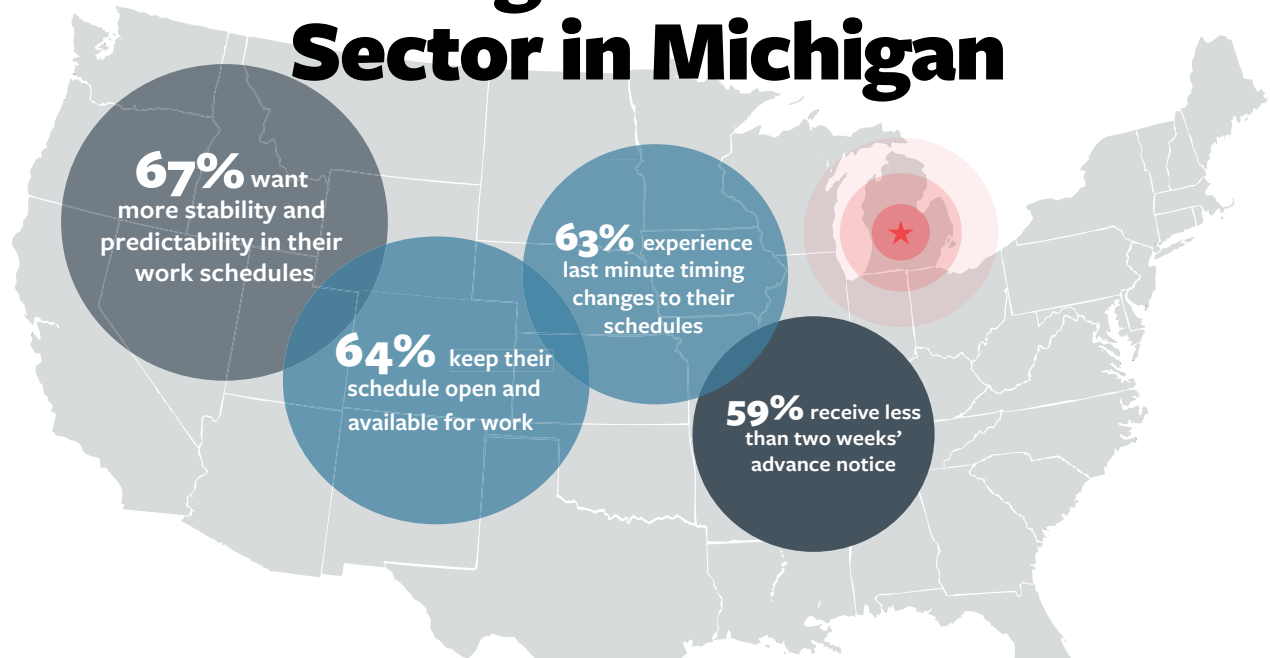


Working in the Service Sector in Michigan



Service sector jobs in the United States are characterized by low pay, few fringe benefits, and limited employee control over scheduled work days and times.¹ 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.² These practices can introduce significant instability into the lives of workers and their families.³

This research brief is part of a series designed to advance our understanding of working conditions in the service sector – in particular, schedule instability and unpredictability – in cities and states across the country. Since 2016, The Shift Project has collected survey data from workers employed at large chain retailers and food-service establishments, including in grocery, big box, pharmacy, retail apparel, hardware, fast food, casual dining, and logistics.⁴ We ask respondents about their work schedules, household economic security, health, and wellbeing, sampling employees of the large service-sector firms that are the focus of recent state and local labor regulation efforts. Our data permit an unprecedented view of labor conditions

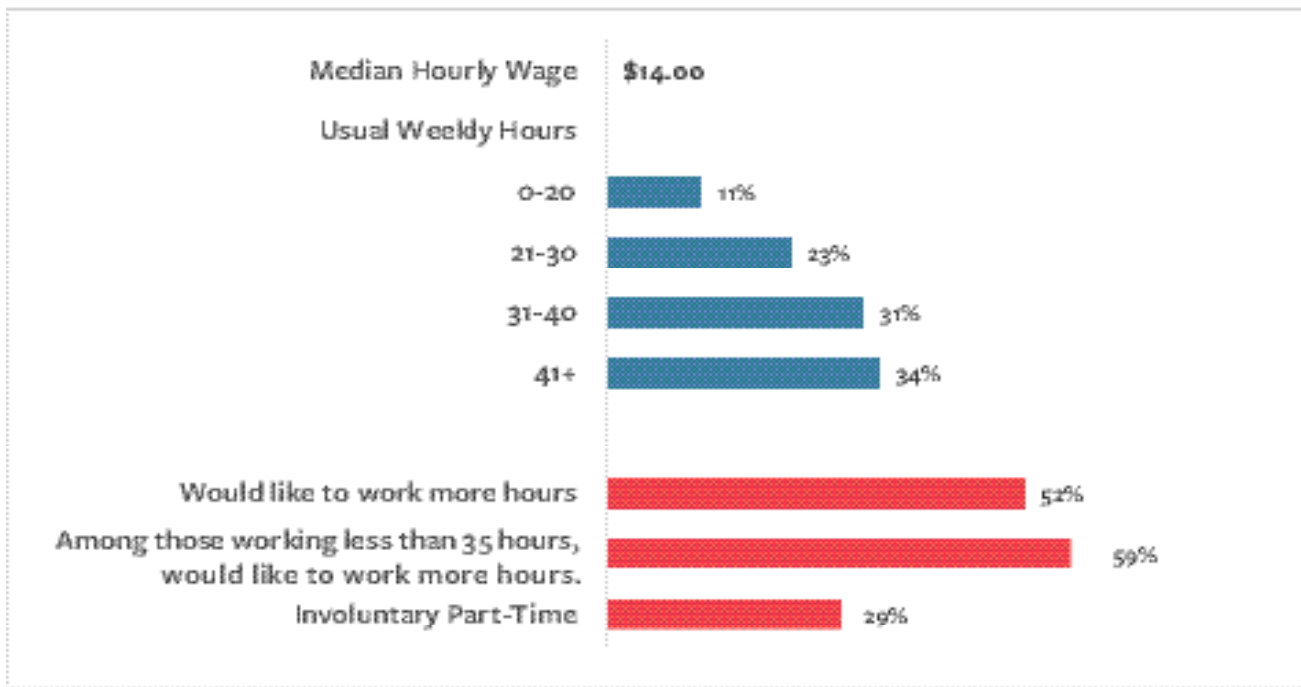
in the service sector and provide unparalleled insight into the work and family lives of low-wage workers.

Around 560,000 people, 13% of the labor force, were employed in the retail and food service sectors in the state of Michigan as of 2022.⁵ This brief describes the experiences reported by 5,364 of these Michigan workers in order to capture working conditions in Michigan's service sector.

Insufficient Wages and Work Hours

The service sector in Michigan, as well as elsewhere in the United States, is characterized by low-wage jobs. During the observation period from July 2017 to December 2022, the Michigan minimum wage increased from \$8.90 in 2017 to \$9.87 in 2022. In our sample, Michigan workers earned a median wage of \$14.00, still far short of the estimated living wage of \$16.36 per hour for a single adult with no children.⁶ In fact, 77% of workers (56% of whom had children) in our sample fell below Michigan's estimated living wage for a single adult with no children.

Figure 1. Job Characteristics for Michigan Service Sector Workers



And yet while median wages grew from \$11.00 in 2017 to \$14.00 in 2022 for these Michigan workers, wages are only part of the income equation. To make a livable income, workers need not only a living wage, but also sufficient work hours. Yet only 34% of Michigan service sector workers report working 40 or more hours per week. Half of hourly Michigan service sector workers report working less than 35 hours per week, and 23% of workers reported working fewer than 25 hours per week.

While some workers are employed on a part-time basis voluntarily, many workers in the service sector in Michigan are involuntarily part time. Most Michigan workers we surveyed (52%) reported a desire to work more hours than they typically receive. An even higher percentage of those working fewer than 35 hours per week report a desire to work more hours (59%). Nearly a third of Michigan workers (29%) can be characterized as “involuntary part-time” workers who work fewer than 35 hours per week at their main job and would like more hours. If we raise the hourly standard for full-time from 35 to 40 hours, we find that 58% of workers that typically work fewer than 40 hours per week at their primary job would like more hours and, by this measure, 37% of workers would be considered involuntary part-time.

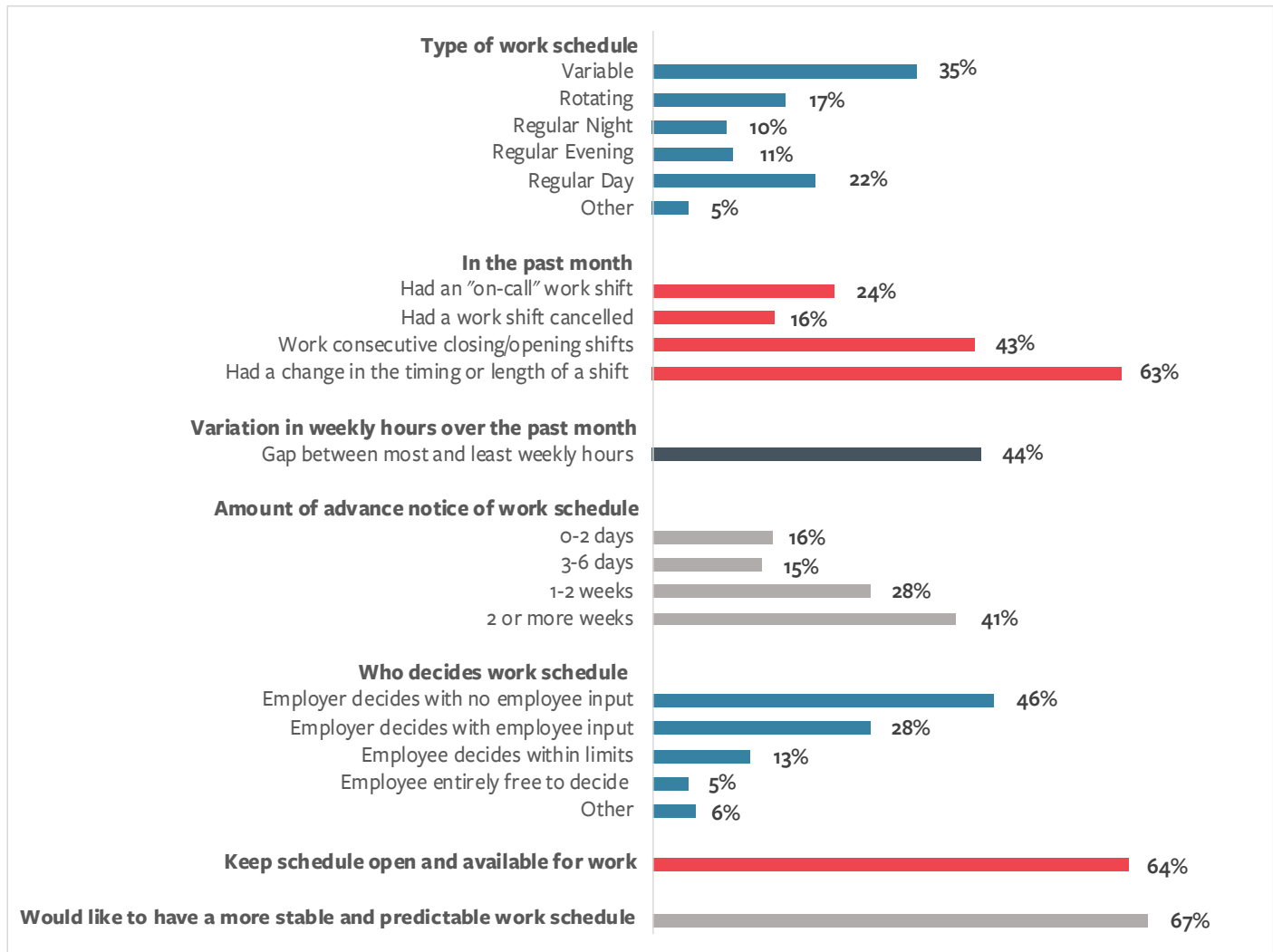
Unstable and Unpredictable Work Schedules

In addition to low wages and insufficient work hours, Michigan workers also face unstable and unpredictable work schedules.

Rather than a regular day shift or overnight shift, the Michigan workers in our sample report schedules that are highly variable. Over half of workers report irregular schedules: 35% report “variable” schedules” and 17% report “rotating” schedules. Another 21% report regularly working a night or evening shift. Only 22% of workers report a regular daytime work schedule. In addition to the high prevalence of irregular shifts and shifts at non-standard times, nearly half of workers (43%) reported working consecutive closing then opening shifts in the prior month, referred to as “clopensing.”

These schedules are often announced with very little advance notice. Fewer than half (41%) of workers receive 2 weeks or more advance notice of their work schedules. Twenty-eight percent receive between 1 and 2 weeks’ notice. The remaining 31% of workers receive less than 1 week’s advance notice.

Figure 2. Work Schedule Characteristics for Michigan Service Sector Workers



Of those, half receive no more than two days' notice. Further, twenty-four percent of workers reported working at least one "on-call" work shift in the prior month, meaning that they kept their schedule open and available for work but may or may not actually have been called in to work the shift.

Even once published, workers' schedules are subject to change by management. Sixteen percent of workers reported having at least one shift cancelled in the past month. The majority of workers also experienced last-minute changes to the timing of their work schedules. In fact, nearly two thirds of Michigan workers (63%) reported that they experienced a last-minute change in the timing or length of a scheduled shift (for example, they were asked to come in early or late, or to leave early or stay later than the hours they were originally scheduled).

These unstable and unpredictable scheduling practices, in concert with a generally low base of work hours, conspire to produce a significant amount of variation in the total number of hours worked each week. When asked about their work schedule over the past month, the average worker reported a difference of 13 hours between the week they worked the most hours and the week they worked the fewest hours. This translates into a 44% gap between most and fewest weekly hours worked, which, since these workers are paid hourly, directly leads to volatility in earnings. Indeed, over half (52%) of workers report that their income varies from week to week.

In addition to the common experience of schedule instability and short notice, almost half of workers have no input when it comes to setting their work

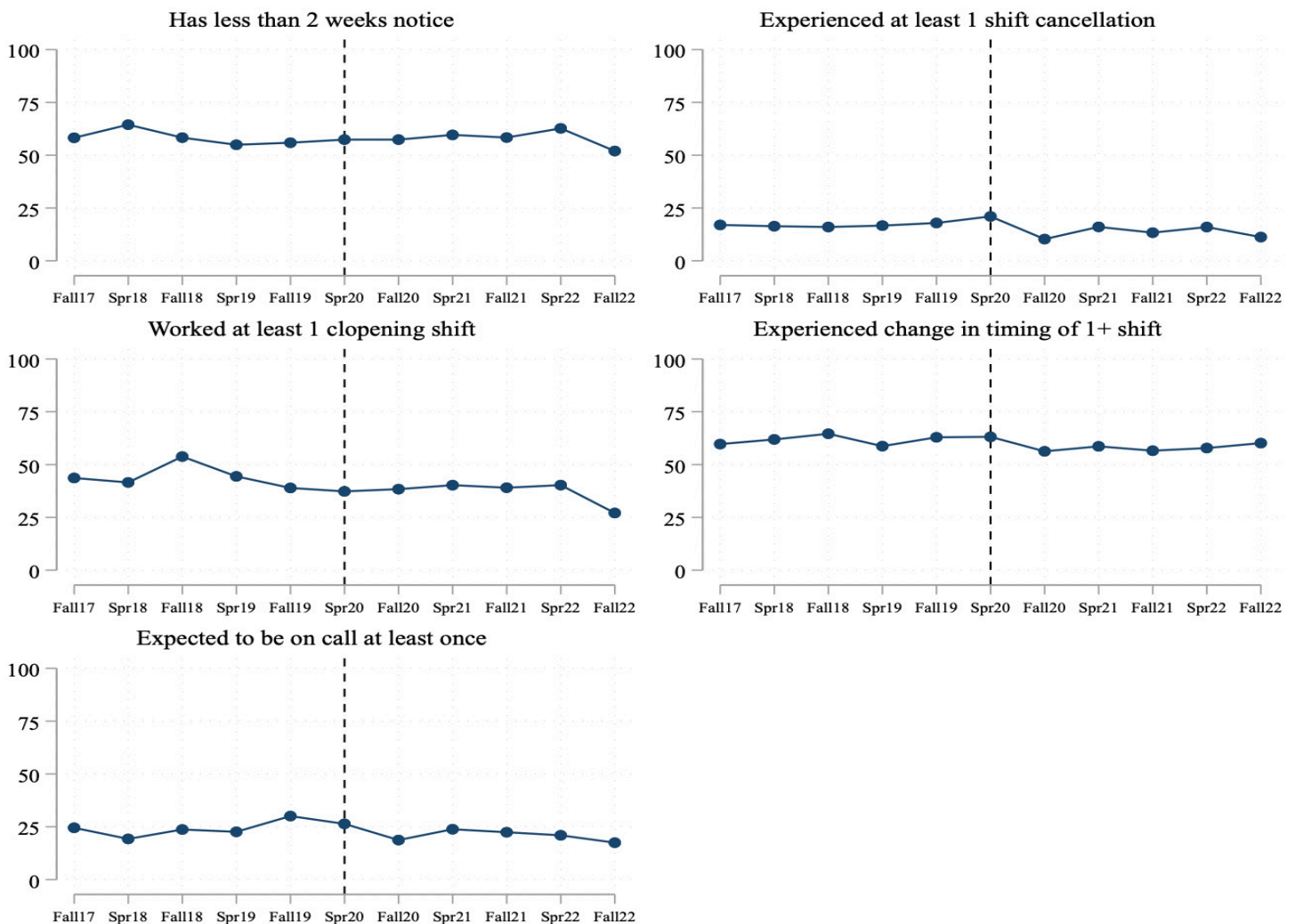
schedules. Another 28% have some input. Only 18% of workers have a large degree of control over their scheduled work days and times. Compounding all these dimensions of scheduling instability, most workers reported that even in their personal time, they have to keep their schedule open and available for work. Nearly two-thirds (64%) of workers report that they keep their schedule open and make themselves available even when they are not scheduled to 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. One clear indication that workers lack flexibility and instead experience substantial instability and unpredictability is that 67% of workers reported that they would like a more stable and predictable work schedule over the period from 2020 to 2022.

Schedules Remained Unstable and Unpredictable During COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has shone a bright light on the important work of grocery, food service, pharmacy, delivery and fulfillment, and other service sector workers. Many large firms have publicly praised the work of their frontline employees.⁷ But, in terms of working conditions, we find that little has changed for Michigan service sector workers during the pandemic.

Michigan service sector workers who have worked during the months of the pandemic experience similarly high levels of on-call shifts and last minute timing changes as before the pandemic. By some measures, service workers who worked through the pandemic

Figure 3. Scheduling Characteristics by Wave



actually experienced slightly more unpredictability than before. A larger share (60%) of these workers received less than two weeks' notice of their schedule than before the pandemic (58%). Similarly, slightly more workers reported working an on-call shift during the pandemic (25%) than previously (24%).

While the pre-COVID trends largely have not changed, there are some cases of increased schedule stability. Fewer workers experienced at least one shift cancellation (16% during COVID-19 compared to 18% prior), having a last-minute shift timing change (61% compared to 64% prior), or working an on-call shift (22% compared to 27% prior), and clopening (40% during the pandemic compared to 47% prior). For the service sector workers who remained employed during the COVID-19 pandemic, schedules were less likely to be changed last-minute or cancelled, but still over half of workers contended with unexpected shift timing changes.

At the same time, workers saw a slight increase in wages but little change in hours. Prior to the pandemic, the median hourly wage held steady at around \$11. Due to factors such as inflation, hazard pay, and increased incentives to attract workers,⁸ wages increased during the pandemic, reaching \$14.00 per hour in Fall of 2022. However, this was not accompanied by an increase or even stability in work hours. In the same period, usual weekly hours worked stayed level at 35 hours per week. At the same time, there was a small reduction in the share of workers who wanted to work more hours (55% to 49%), and a small reduction in the share of workers who were involuntarily part-time (32% to 27%). The small decrease in workers we would consider involuntary part-time in the absence of an increase in usual hours could be a by-product of the extraordinary circumstances of the pandemic, which often increased caregiving demands at home.⁹

Although many service sector workers have taken on extra health risks in order to serve customers and sustain businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic, they have just as little control over these “just-in-time” schedule changes as in pre-COVID times. Nearly half (46%) of workers report having no say in their scheduled hours during the pandemic. While service sector workers are increasingly recognized for the value of their work, that recognition has not translated into a more secure schedule, more stable hours, or more schedule input.

Challenges Reported by Michigan Workers

Given the constellation of unstable and unpredictable scheduling practices experienced by Michigan's service sector workers in our sample, it is not surprising that many of these workers report that their work schedule interferes with their family needs and caregiving responsibilities. Nearly half of workers tell us that their work schedule does not provide enough flexibility to handle family needs, and seven in ten find it challenging to address family matters during work. Most Michigan workers, 71%, also report having difficulty getting time off when needed.

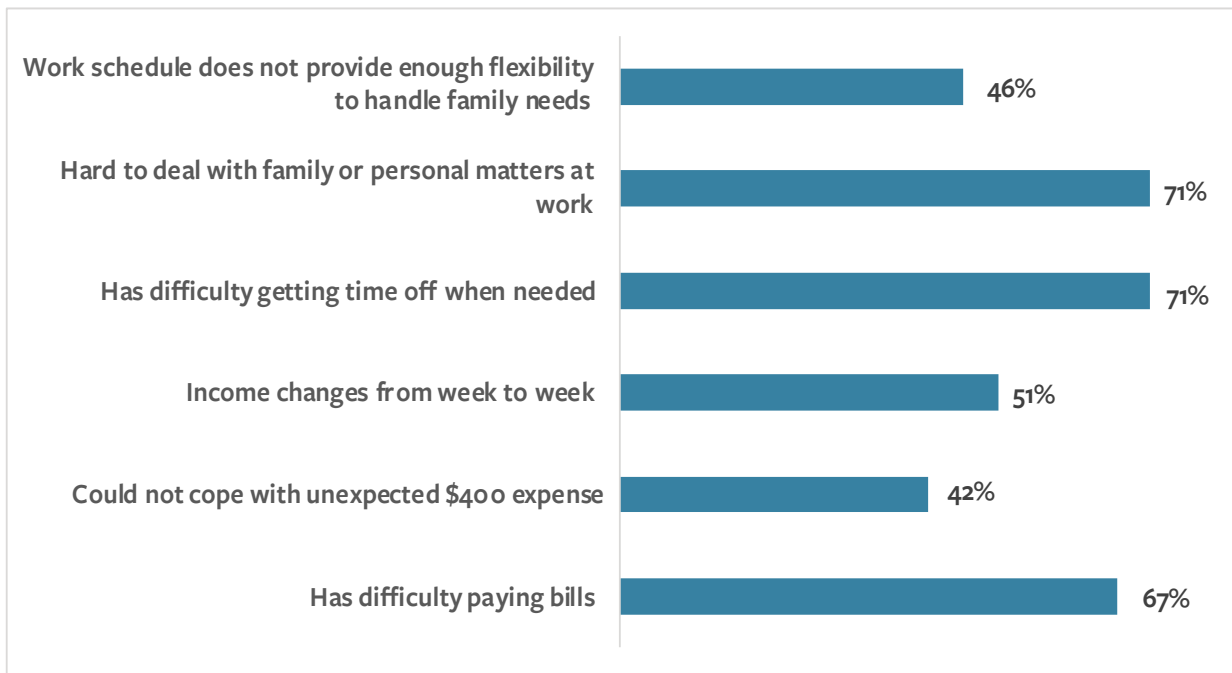
The variation in hours coupled with low wages, and, for some workers, insufficient hours, leads to income volatility and financial insecurity. In our sample, 67% of workers reported that, in a typical month, they find it very difficult or somewhat difficult to cover their expenses and pay all their bills. When we asked workers whether they could come up with \$400 if an unexpected need arose within the next month, 42% doubted that they could come up with the money.

The Relationship Between Work Schedules and Worker Health

Overall, many Michigan service sector workers faced significant work-life conflict and economic insecurity. Exposure to unstable and unpredictable schedules may exacerbate these problems and even negatively affect workers' health and wellbeing. Short notice and last-minute schedule changes may lead to economic instability for workers and may also increase work-life conflict, while chronic uncertainty about one's schedule may be an added source of stress.

To examine how just-in-time scheduling affects worker health, we compare the economic security and health and wellbeing of workers with the most stable and predictable schedules to those with the least stable and predictable schedules.¹⁰ We find that:

Figure 4. Challenges Reported by Michigan Service Workers



- **Workers with unpredictable work schedules are much more likely to report having experienced hunger hardship in the past year.** Our survey asked all workers, “In the past 12 months, were you ever hungry, but didn’t eat because you couldn’t afford enough food?” 40% of Michigan workers with the least predictable schedules experienced hunger in the past year, compared to 16% with the most predictable schedules
- **Workers with unpredictable work schedules report worse sleep quality.** Seventy-eight percent of Michigan workers with the least predictable schedules report poor or fair sleep quality, compared to 56% of workers with the most predictable work schedules.
- **Workers with unpredictable work schedules are less happy.** Nearly half (45%) of Michigan workers with the least predictable schedules report being unhappy, compared to 29% of workers with the most predictable schedules.
- **Workers with unpredictable schedules are significantly more distressed.** We asked workers how often they felt each of five types of distress in the past month (sadness, nervousness, restlessness, hopelessness, and that everything was an effort). Forty-two percent of workers with the least predictable schedules reported experiencing frequent distress, which is twice the rate among workers with the most predictable schedules.¹¹

Intergenerational Consequences of Unstable Work Scheduling

More than a quarter (28%) of the Michigan retail and food-service workers in our sample are parents living with children aged 0 to 14. Despite their caregiving obligations, these workers report similar exposure to unstable and unpredictable schedules as workers without young children. However, the consequences of these unpredictable schedules were more severe than for the sample overall.

Thirty-eight percent of parents with young children say they are given less than seven days’ notice of their next schedule. Even if a parent knows their schedule in advance, they can still be subject to last minute changes. Over half (62%) of parents we surveyed experienced a change in the timing or length of a scheduled shift in the previous month, and two-thirds (64%) of parents had to keep their schedule open and available for work.

Many parents said that their schedules and income can vary dramatically from week to week. Half (53%) of the parents we surveyed said their incomes were volatile, going up and down depending on the week. On average, a parent worker’s shortest work week was about 14 hours shorter than their longest work week in the previous

month. Parents have the added financial responsibility of providing for another person, and these unstable scheduling practices can create extra challenges in making ends meet. Of parents with the least predictable schedules, 46% said they were unable to afford food at some point in the last year, a substantially larger share than for the sample overall (27%).

The stress of navigating unstable schedules and volatile income along with the demands of family life can have negative consequences on the psychological well-being of parents. 54% percent of parents with the least predictable schedules indicated that they were unhappy and 46% of parents with the least predictable schedules reported frequent psychological distress, shares more than double that of parents with the most predictable schedules.

For working parents, like those in the service sector in Michigan, schedule instability and unpredictability can spill over and have negative consequences for their children.¹² Children thrive in environments of security, consistency, and support, with stable and high-quality child care arrangements, but just-in-time scheduling makes arranging this type of care very difficult.¹³

In prior research, we have examined the consequences of these scheduling practices for working parents of young children aged 0 to 9 (early years that are crucial to healthy child development). We find that

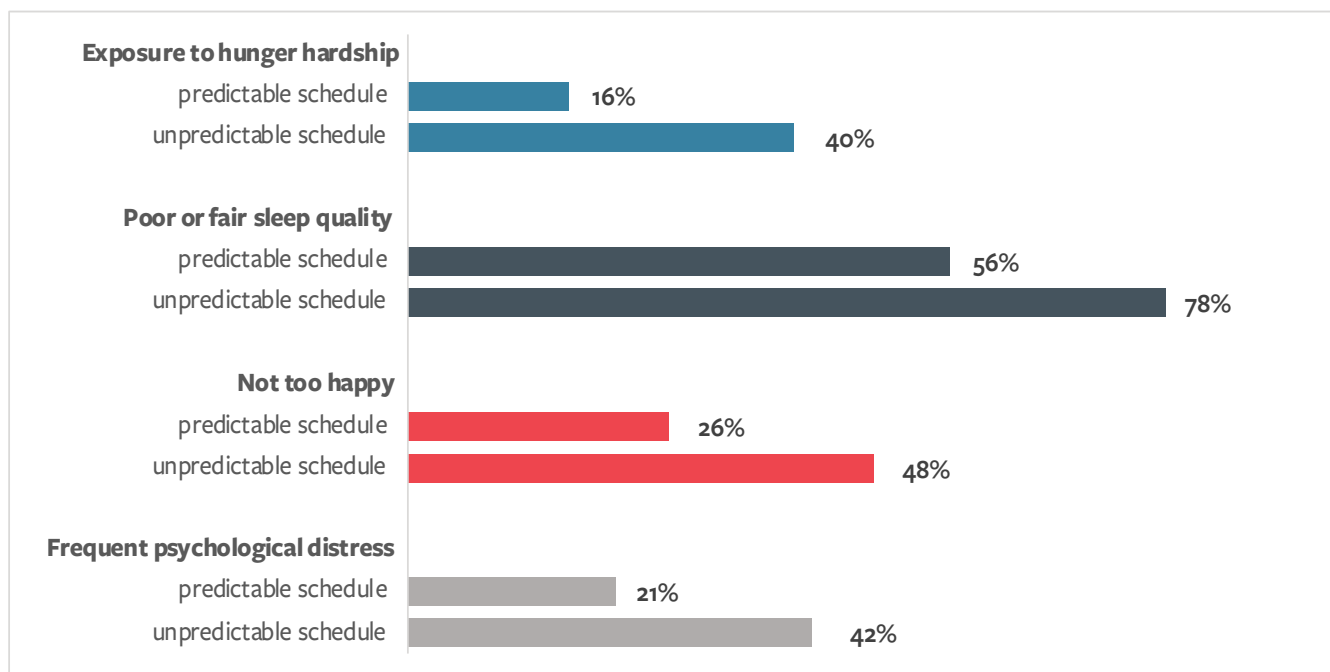
parents' exposure to on-call work and last-minute shift changes are associated with a reliance on informal care arrangements involving multiple, rotating caregivers (including siblings who might be young children themselves), and rarely involving high-quality center-based childcare.¹⁴

Further, unstable and unpredictable schedules may reduce child wellbeing by undermining household economic security, upsetting family routines, and introducing strain and stress into everyday parent-child interactions that would ideally be warm and supportive. We observe that children whose parents' experience schedule instability exhibit more "internalizing" or sad behaviors (feeling worthless, anxious, guilty, self-conscious, unhappy, or worried) and more "externalizing" or mad behaviors (arguing, destroying things, being disobedient, stubborn, having temper tantrums, or making threats).¹⁵

Discussion

The Shift Project's survey of service workers provides a window into the experiences of workers employed at large retail and food establishments across the nation. This brief describes the experiences of workers in Michigan, with specific attention to the associations between unstable and unpredictable work schedules and their consequences.

Figure 5. Comparing Health and Wellbeing Outcomes for Michigan Service Workers



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

Despite staffing the front lines during the COVID-19 pandemic and a tight labor market in which many employers report difficulty hiring workers, work schedules in the Michigan service-sector remain unstable and unpredictable a year and half into the pandemic.

But, in some cities and states around the country, work scheduling practices are beginning to change as a result of labor laws that regulate work schedules. The state of Oregon, New York City, Seattle, Philadelphia, Chicago, San Francisco, and Emeryville (CA) have all passed legislation or implemented regulations requiring a certain amount of advance notice of work schedules (usually two weeks) and stipulating that workers be compensated by employers when their shifts are changed on shorter notice. Many of the new labor regulations also include an “access to hours” provision, requiring that employers offer more hours to their part-time workers before hiring additional part-time employees.

Secure scheduling laws are making a difference in workers’ lives. In an evaluation of Seattle’s secure scheduling ordinance, researchers at the Shift Project find that the 2017 law led to greater schedule predictability and stability for Seattle service sector workers. The law substantially decreased the share of workers reporting last-minute timing changes, increased the share of workers who received notice of their schedule at least two weeks in advance, and reduced on-call shifts. These more stable and predictable schedules improved the lives of retail and food service workers. The Shift Project evaluation

found that two years after implementation, the law had significantly improved workers’ overall happiness, sleep quality, and material wellbeing.¹⁶

Were Michigan to follow the lead of cities like Seattle or a state like Oregon and pass a secure scheduling law, our data suggest that such legislation could have a significant benefits for service sector workers and their families, and would be responsive to workers’ prevailing desire for more hours and more stable work schedules. The recent evidence from Seattle suggests that regulating work schedules enhances stability and improves worker wellbeing.

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Endnotes

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- ¹⁰ We define workers with the “most predictable schedules” as those who typically receive at least 2 weeks’ advance notice of their schedules; did not work on-call, have a shift cancelled, or work a “clopening” shift in the last month; and did not recently experience a change to the timing or length of a shift. Workers with the “least predictable schedules” are those who typically receive less than 2 weeks’ advance notice; worked at least one on-call shift, experienced at least one cancelled shift, and worked at least one “clopening” shift in the past month; and recently experienced a change to the timing or length of a shift.
- ¹¹ These findings are based on “regression analysis,” a widely-used analytic technique in the social sciences, which is designed to isolate the effects of unpredictable work schedules while “holding constant” other influences. In this case, the reported relationships between having an unpredictable work schedule and health and hardship outcomes are “net of” statistical controls for worker age, gender, children in household, educational attainment, school enrollment, marital status, household income, hourly wage, job tenure, usual hours, and managerial status, as well as year and month fixed-effects. However, we also note that these are not causal estimates. These results are based on the same regression models that we use to estimate the association between work schedules and worker health and wellbeing for a national survey of workers. These methods are described in detail in Schneider, D. and K. Harknett. 2019. “Consequences of Routine Work-Schedule Instability for Worker Health and Well-Being.” *American Sociological Review* 84(1): 82-114.
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Methodological Appendix

The Shift Project collected survey data from over 100,000 service sector workers employed at large retail and food establishments across the country between July 2017 and December 2022. This brief focused on a subsample of 5,364 service sector workers in the state of Michigan who completed Shift surveys.

The Shift Project 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 who would be affected by a scheduling law like the ones passed in San Francisco, Seattle, Emeryville, New York City, Philadelphia, Chicago, and Oregon.

Those who responded to the Shift 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 or \$500 Amazon gift card. 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 Michigan. These weights are constructed in two stages. First, we construct survey weights to adjust the demographic characteristics of the Michigan Shift survey sample to match the demographic characteristics of Michigan service sector workers in the American Community Survey (ACS) for the years 2010-2018. 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 Michigan.

Second, to ensure that our sample accurately reflects the distribution of employment types among large retail and food service employers in Michigan, 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 Michigan. 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 Michigan, we weight our Shift survey sample to match the distribution of retail apparel, food service, grocery, and other industries in Michigan. All of the descriptive results we present in this report apply these ACS demographic and RefUSA industry weights.

For a detailed discussion of The Shift Project data collection, methodology, and data validation, see Schneider, D. and Harknett, K. 2022. "What's to Like? Facebook as a Tool for Survey Data Collection." *Sociological Methods & Research*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0049124119882477>