

UNPREDICTABLE, UNSUSTAINABLE:

The Impact of Employers' Scheduling Practices in D.C.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY JUNE 2015

The push to boost corporate profits and keep labor costs low has led many companies to adopt scheduling practices that often result in erratic and unpredictable hours for the women and men who work for them. New data reveals the prevalence of such “just-in-time” scheduling in Washington, D.C.’s service sector. In line with previous research, it finds that this approach to scheduling negatively impacts many employees’ lives.

Key Findings

Insufficient work hours, combined with low wages, prevent employees from making ends meet.

- **Low Pay Common:** The typical employee works 32 hours per week at a pay rate of \$10 per hour resulting in an annual income of approximately \$16,000, well below \$13.80, the living wage for D.C. government contractors as of January 1, 2015.¹
- **More Hours Needed:** Four out of five people said it was very important or somewhat important to get more hours.
- **Second Jobs Required:** Nearly one-quarter of individuals work at least one additional job.

Employees face erratic schedules as a result of employer policies.

- **Unpredictable Schedules:** A typical respondent faces a 13 hour range in weekly hours per month, receiving as little as 25 hours some weeks and a high of 38 hours in other weeks.
- **Lack of Advance Notice:** Nearly half of employees reported first learning of their work schedules less than one week in advance; one-third receive initial work schedules with less than three days’ notice; and nearly one-third of retail and restaurant/food service employees reported receiving less than 24 hours’ notice of schedule changes.
- **Life On Hold For On-Call Shifts:** Individuals assigned on-call/call-in shifts appear to have a 50/50 chance of getting paid to work, despite holding time each week for their employers.
- **Shortened Shifts:** Half of those working in the restaurant/food service industry reported being sent home before working their full shifts.
- **Part-Time Work, Full-Time Availability:** Sixty percent of individuals said they must always be available to fulfill any assigned work schedule—regardless of the days or hours—in order to be considered for full-time hours or the best shifts available.

Unpredictable, Unsustainable: The Impact of Employers’ Scheduling Practices in D.C.

examines scheduling practices in Washington, D.C.’s service sector, particularly focusing on the retail and restaurant/food service industries, through a survey conducted with 436 respondents in 2015.

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Scheduling policies, such as just-in-time practices, make life difficult for employees and their families.

- **Economic Insecurity:** Just over 17 percent of individuals overall, and 21 percent of employees in the restaurant/food-service industry, reported that their work schedule hindered their ability to budget.
- **Childcare Difficulties:** Among employees with dependents age 13 or younger, 28 percent reported that their work schedules complicate childcare arrangements.
- **Education Challenges:** Twelve percent said their work schedules negatively impact their ability to attend classes or job training.
- **Employment Options Limited:** Some 12 percent of individuals said they could not pursue a second job despite wanting to do so.

Common Just-in-Time Scheduling Practices:

- Split shifts are back-to-back shifts separated by more than one hour.
- Shortened shifts describe when workers are sent home before working a full shift, often without compensation.
- On-call/call-in shifts describe when workers are called at the last-minute, or told to call into work at the last minute, to see if they must work certain shifts.

Greater protections are needed for employees who may not request changes to their schedules out of fear, or direct experience of employer retaliation.

- **Fear of Retaliation:** Twenty-three percent of individuals said they fear consequences for requesting a scheduling change. And 18 percent reported being penalized for requesting a different schedule or limiting when they could work.
- **Women Face Greater Retaliation:** Twenty-three percent of women reported work penalties for requesting a different schedule or limiting their availability, compared to 13 percent of men.

What Can Be Done?

Too many of our neighbors who serve our food, stock our shelves and sweep our floors have jobs that grant too few hours on too short notice, requiring them to be at the beck and call of their employers. D.C. policymakers should take commonsense actions that will help provide employees access to fair, predictable schedules without burdening employers. These types of rules benefit employers as well as employees—evidence suggests employees with schedules that can be adapted to better align with life responsibilities are more productive and engaged in their work, while having lower rates of absenteeism.² Encouraging and enforcing stable work scheduling practices will mark significant progress toward making Washington, D.C. a great place to live, work and sustain a family.

“It’s frustrating and it’s stressful to not get hours. The money from 20 hours a week only gets me back and forth to work but nothing more for my family.”

– Stephanie Dunn, part-time cashier, whose hours have been cut by her boss from 25 to 20 to 15 hours a week since joining the staff at Marshalls in October 2013

“My biggest issue with my job is scheduling and the lack of raises. Co-workers have been leaving because they can’t get a raise or get enough hours to live...We all have tried to complain and even attempted to mention [these issues] to the manager but she said if you don’t like it here you can move on and handed out resignation letters for anyone who may had [sic] a problem.”

– Anonymous employee who has worked at Forever 21 for three and a half years

1 See “Living Wage Act of 2006 Fact Sheet”, http://does.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/does/page_content/attachments/Living%20Wage%20Act%20Fact%20Sheet

2 Liz Ben-Ishai, “Job Schedules That Work for Businesses,” Center for Law and Social Policy, Nov. 2014 <<http://www.clasp.org/resources-and-publications/publication-1/Job-Schedules-that-Work-for-Businesses.pdf>>.