
**Promising Policies and Practices to
Reduce Work and Child Care
Instabilities and Promote
Employment**

Breakout Session of the 2008 Annual
Meeting of the Child Care Policy
Research Consortium, July 31-Aug 1
(2:15-3:30pm, July 31, 2008, Oriental A,
Mandarin Hotel, Washington DC)

Panelists

- Gina Adams, Urban Institute
 - Shelley Waters Boots, Urban Institute
 - Deanna Schexnayder, University of Texas
 - Julia Henly, University of Chicago
-

Panel Purpose

- To explore key features of employment and child care policies and practices that create instabilities for low-income families
- To highlight promising policy and practice reforms aimed at reducing instabilities and improving employment outcomes.
- Extension of a 2006 breakout session at the CCPRC Annual Meeting, “Employers and the Low Wage Workforce” (Waters Boots, Davis, Acs, & Henly)

Improving work outcomes of low-income parents is a key goal of CCDF, yet employment and/or child care instability can compromise this goal for many low-income families

Purpose of the panel is twofold:

to explore key features of employment and child care policies and practices that create instabilities for low-income families

To highlight promising policy and practice reforms aimed at reducing instabilities and improving employment outcomes.

Why focus on employment at CCPRC?

Employment is essential to improving the economic well-being of economically disadvantaged families, however it is too often a source of instability for these families

Employment instability creates challenges to finding and maintaining child care arrangements and can interfere with child care subsidy receipt and maintenance

Panel Structure

- Responding to Instability through Employment
 - Julia Henly
 - Shelley Waters Boots

 - Responding to Instability through Child Care Policy
 - Deanna Schexnayder
 - Gina Adams
-

**Employment-Based Challenges:
Scheduling and its implications for
Child Care**

Julia Henly
University of Chicago

Presentation based on the following research projects

- **Study of Organizational Stratification (SOS), Lambert**
 - Aim: to understand how low-level jobs are structured within firms and the relative opportunities afforded workers across job types and across workplaces
 - 22 Chicago-area workplaces (all major corporations); 88 low-skilled, hourly jobs; 4 industries (hospitality, financial, retail, transportation)
- **Study of Work-Child Care Fit (SWCCF), Henly**
 - Aim: to understand how job conditions shape child care needs; to describe and understand work-child care management strategies
 - Qualitative interview study with 54 mothers working in retail SOS sites and a subsample of 30 of their child care providers.
- **Scheduling Intervention Study (SIS), Lambert & Henly**
 - Aim: to assess the feasibility of reducing workplace instability through improving the predictability of retail workers schedules.
 - National women's apparel retailer with stores concentrated in Midwestern and Eastern states
 - Study includes both a Manager Survey of scheduling practices (144 stores in five regions) and a Workplace Intervention designed to increase schedule predictability.

Acknowledgements

- Susan Lambert, University of Chicago, Co-Principal Investigator of *Scheduling Intervention Study* and Principal Investigator of the *Study of Organizational Stratification*
 - Excellent research assistance of several student research assistants on each of the three studies from which I draw in this presentation.
 - Generous support from: USDHHS (ASPE) Research Development Grant; Child Care Scholars Dissertation Grant from Child Care Bureau; Russell Sage Foundation, Ford Foundation, Annie E. Casey Foundation
-

The Problem of Low-Wage Work: It's Not Just Low Wages

*(Elizabeth Davis, 2006 CCPRC Annual Meeting,
"Employers and the Low-Wage Workforce")*

- Low wage jobs tend to be characterized by:
 - Lack of flexibility
 - Variable schedules
 - Non standard hours
 - Limited or no benefits
 - Limited training and promotion opportunities
 - Limited "voice" or input on the job
 - Limited job security
 - Limited earnings growth potential



Forms of Employment Instability

- Job loss is only one form of employment instability
 - For many low-wage workers, job loss is the end point of a job tenure characterized by employment-based instabilities that result from many of the characteristics listed on the previous slide.

 - On-the-job instabilities are created through everyday employer practices
 - For example, the process by which work schedules are set, posted, and changed
 - The limited degree of paid or unpaid access to time-off
-

Findings from our research with employers and employees in the Chicago area

- Common practice in many firms to:
 - post workers' schedules with limited advanced notice
 - Typically one week or less
 - schedule workers for a different number of hours day-to-day, week-to-week, season-to-season
 - Hours can fluctuate for both part-time and full-time hourly workers
 - schedule workers for different shifts and days, even if scheduled for same number of hours each week
- These practices translate into a great deal of schedule unpredictability for workers
-

Findings (cont):

- Schedules are “flexible”, but to the benefit of the employer not the employee
 - The flexibility is disproportionately employer-driven
 - Employers seek employees with “open availability”
 - Limited employee control over hours; although short-term, unpaid time off when requested infrequently and in advance was typically granted
 - Some workers could “claim availability”, but because employers preferred open availability and because there were no minimum hour guarantees, claiming hours could result in hour penalties
 - Although the term “flexible work arrangements” is commonly used in the work-family field, its meaning can be ambiguous. What is flexible for employers, often creates instability for workers.
 - Employer vs Employee-driven Control may be a less ambiguous and more helpful way to characterize jobs.
-

Findings (cont):

- Limited advance notice and limited employee control over scheduling
- (1) interfered with employees' ability to effectively structure and use their nonwork hours.
 - Difficulty planning family meals, adopting consistent homework and bedtime routines, volunteering at their children's school, and following through on appointments.
 - (2) posed complications for child care.
 - Disproportionate use of informal care and multiple arrangements.
 - Multiple care arrangements were complicated to maintain and contingent on the follow through of multiple actors.
 - Arrangements often scheduled at the last minute. And hastily organized child care often fell through, and could lead to tardiness or absenteeism at work.
 - Hour fluctuations challenge subsidy application in a system where subsidy determination is based on the number of hours worked per week.
-

Responding to Schedule Instability

- Question:

- Is the unpredictability characteristic of many low-wage jobs inherent to the work, or the result of management practices that are amenable to change?

 - If amenable to change, what?
-

The Scheduling Intervention Study

(Susan Lambert & Julia Henly)

- An effort to work with an employer to try to improve the predictability of hourly employees' work schedules
 - By increasing the amount of advance notice workers have about their work schedules, the study hypothesizes that employees will have greater ability to plan and manage their personal lives, including child care.
-

Scheduling Intervention Study:

Hypotheses

- Three primary processes through which intervention is likely to affect workers
 - Reduce stress by providing more control over personal life
 - Reduce time-based conflicts allowing workers to make better use of their nonwork time
 - Increase sense of organizational support

 - Specifically, we hypothesize that workers in the experimental stores relative to control stores will experience:
 - Better work performance
 - Less perceived work-to-family conflict
 - Fewer interferences with nonwork roles and activities (child care, family and caregiving, school, second job)
 - More positive health behaviors and family practices
 - Better psychological health
-

Scheduling Intervention Study: Design Features

- **Components of Intervention**
 - Making work more predictable: Posting schedules a month at a time (instead of posting schedules weekly, with only 2 to 3 days lead time)
 - Improving communication between employees and managers around scheduling preferences and needs: By establishing system for employees to express preferences for work hours and also to indicate changes to their availability and the number of hours they can work.
 - **Cluster-randomized experiment.** Stores matched on turnover and sales and then randomly assigned to intervention and control conditions
 - **National women's apparel retailer** with stores concentrated in Midwestern and Eastern states (in progress: 21 stores in Chicago area; projected: 48 -60 in New York/New Jersey area). Stores are small with 10-12 employees.
-

The Scheduling Intervention Study: Data Sources

Multiple sources of data

- **Corporate administrative data** Personnel records to track turnover (monthly)
 - **Store data** Posted, revised, and worked (actual payroll) schedules for associates (weekly)
 - **Sales data** by associate and store (weekly)
 - **Employee Well-being Surveys** Telephone surveys of all store employees (2nd baseline and wrap-up periods)
 - **Manager Survey** Telephone surveys of store managers regarding their hiring, staffing, and scheduling practices and challenges (141 managers) (completed)
-

Scheduling Intervention Study: Progress to date

- Completed pilot intervention with promising results
 - Completed manager survey, analysis in progress
 - In the field in Chicago
-

Selected References

- Lambert, S. (in press). Making a difference for hourly employees. Chapter to appear in Alan Booth and Ann C. Crouter, (Eds.), *Work-Life Policies that Make a Real Difference for Individuals, Families, and Communities*. Washington, D.C.: Urban Institute Press.
 - Lambert, S. & Henly, J.R. (2007). Lower-level jobs and work-family studies, *Sloan Work and Family Encyclopedia*.
 - Henly, J. R., Shaefer, H.L., & Waxman, R.E. (2006). Nonstandard work schedules: Employer- and employee-driven flexibility in retail jobs. *Social Service Review*, 80, 609–634.
 - Henly, J.R. & Lambert, S. (2005). Nonstandard work and child-care needs of low-income parents. Chapter 30 in Bianchi, S.M., Casper, L.M., & King, R.B. (Eds.), *Work, Family, Health, and Well-Being*, 473-492. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.
-

**For more information, and to request
copies of papers, please contact:**

- Julia Henly, jhenly@uchicago.edu
 - Susan Lambert, slambert@uchicago.edu

 - Contact address: 969 E. 60th St., School of
Social Service Administration, University of
Chicago, Chicago, IL 60637
-