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OPPORTUNITIES FOR POLICY LEADERSHIP ON SHIFT WORK

Shift work has been linked to high levels of family stress, poor health, and significant fatigue that can negatively impact on-the-job productivity and safety. While some working families use shift work as a strategic way to address caregiving needs, their own health may suffer as a result. State leaders can take steps that will help mitigate the deleterious effects of shift work on working families.

WHAT IS SHIFT WORK?

“Shift work refers to a job schedule in which employees work hours other than the standard hours of 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. or a schedule other than the standard workweek—Monday through Friday in the United States.”

Shift work is an integral part of the American employment experience. Our economy relies on one out of every five Americans in the labor force to work during nonstandard times. Shift workers are particularly important in certain segments of the economy, such as the service industry. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2009), growth in service industries is expected to account for most of the new jobs created between 2004 and 2016 (15.7 million new wage and salary jobs). This anticipated expansion of shift work may take a toll on working families.

WHY IS SHIFT WORK A POLICY MATTER?

State laws can help mitigate the negative effects of shift work on working families, as well as improve safety and productivity on the job.

- Employers might give employees more choice and control over the shifts they work if state laws rewarded them for doing so.
- State laws could encourage employers to monitor any adverse health impacts of shift work.
- State laws could encourage the expansion of child care available during nontraditional working hours.

WHO WORKS SHIFTS?

Although shift work cuts across ethnic groups, socioeconomic class, and age and gender lines, affecting working families throughout the country, certain trends in workforce development have affected who works shifts.

- In a 2004 U.S. Department of Labor Study, men were more likely than women to work an alternative shift (16.7% and 12.4%, respectively). In addition, Blacks were more likely than Whites, Hispanics or Latinos, or Asians to work such shifts.
- The prevalence of shift work is greatest among workers in service occupations, such as protective service (50.6%)—which includes police, firefighters, and security guards—food preparation and serving occupations (40.4%), and production, transportation, and material moving occupations (26.2%).
- Women’s presence continues to increase in shift work operations, and 27% of companies utilizing shift work reported an increase in female shift workers over the past year.
- College graduates are also increasingly doing shift work; 20% of companies utilizing shift workers reported an increase in college graduates doing shift work over the past year.
HOW DOES SHIFT WORK AFFECT YOUR CONSTITUENTS?

Shift workers keep the economy running 24/7 by providing nursing care, protecting us from crime, and keeping stores open later. Yet, research shows that shift workers themselves experience a lower quality of life than nonshift workers.

- Shift workers are prone to an increase in physical health complaints such as sleep disturbances, fatigue, and gastrointestinal issues, as well as an increase in work accidents and work-family conflict.\(^6\)
- Women who regularly work evening shifts, regardless of the number of hours they work, report significantly higher work-family conflict than women who regularly work days.\(^7\)
- Slightly more than one-half of full-time dual-earner couples have at least one partner who works nonstandard hours.\(^4\) This percentage increases to 54.4% among couples with children age 5 to 13.\(^8\)
- The schedules of dual-earner shift-working couples often do not overlap, decreasing the time that spouses can spend together.

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

Innovative state policies that expand child care options, encourage employers to set maximum hours, or provide pay differentials for nonstandard shifts may help ease the strain on families with shift workers, improve safety on the job, reduce turnover, and increase productivity.

- Eleven states and DC (AR, CA, CT, FL, MN, MO, OH, OK, OR, TX, WA) provide financial incentives for companies that provide childcare during nonstandard hours and/or have a stated goal of doing so.
- Ten states (AR, CA, DE, ID, IN, LA, ME, NJ, NY, PA) have statutes that set minimum staffing levels during shifts or set time limits on shift work.
- Five states and DC (AR, CA, MA, OH, WV) provide additional pay or compensatory time off for people who work shifts.
- Eight states (CT, MD, ME, NH, NY, PA, TX, WV) place limits on mandatory shift overtime for health care workers.

HOW DOES SHIFT WORK AFFECT BUSINESSES?

Fatigue and health problems common among shift workers can affect productivity, increase turnover rates, and create unsafe situations on the job.

- In 2005, Circadian found that 61% of facilities employing extended hours shift work reported moderate or severe fatigue problems at their facility. In 2007, that figure increased to 69%.\(^5\)
- Absenteeism and turnover in facilities that use extended hour shifts are three times higher than the U.S. average for all companies.\(^5\)

When shift workers themselves have control over their own schedules, especially overtime, it helps reduce turnover.

- More flexibility in employee scheduling is associated with lower turnover and absenteeism rates.\(^5\)
- In addition, turnover is lower when overtime is voluntary and highest when it is mandated.\(^5\)

Employee assistance programs, shift worker lifestyle training (i.e., training on how to cope with the demands of shift work schedules), and differential pay for night and evening shifts have also been shown to reduce turnover and improve employee health and morale.\(^5\)
Thirteen states proposed legislation relating to shift workers during the 2009 session. These bills concentrated on safe staffing practices and limits on mandatory overtime.

- Eight states introduced bills prohibiting mandatory overtime for health care workers (AK, HI, MA, NY, OH, VT, WA, WI).
- One state proposed establishing a commission on mandatory nurse overtime to study this issue (NC).
- Three states introduced bills prohibiting mandatory overtime for specific groups of workers (IL: state agency workers; NE: residential care workers; WA: corrections officers).
- Two states proposed the establishment of minimum staffing requirements at healthcare facilities (IL, NY).
- One state proposed providing shift differential pay for peace officers (IA).
- One state introduced a bill to protect compensation for nurses whose shift hours are reduced without adequate notice (SC).

WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION?

- Circadian: 24/7 Workforce Solutions — http://www.circadian.com/index.cfm
  Circadian is the global leader in providing 24/7 workforce performance and safety solutions for businesses that operate around the clock. Through a unique combination of consulting expertise, research, software tools, and informative publications, Circadian helps organizations in the 24-hour economy optimize employee performance and reduce the inherent risks and costs of their extended hours operations.
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH)
  http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/
  The mission of NIOSH is to generate new knowledge in the field of occupational safety and health and to transfer that knowledge into practice for the betterment of workers. To accomplish this mission, NIOSH conducts scientific research, develops guidance and authoritative recommendations, disseminates information, and responds to requests for workplace health hazard evaluations.

Sources cited in this Policy Briefing Series


To view additional issues of the Policy Briefing Series, including Phased Retirement and Flexible Work Schedules, please visit: wfnetwork.bc.edu/policy.php

The Sloan Work and Family Research Network can provide you with additional research-based information about working families. Please visit www.bc.edu/wfnetwork, email wfnetwork@bc.edu, or call 617.552.1708.