Work Schedules – Trends and Differences among Key Worker Sub-groups

Gordon B Cooke¹
Isik U Zeytinoglu²
Sara L Mann³
James Chowhan²

¹ Faculty of Business Administration, Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador
² DeGroote School of Business, McMaster University
³ Department of Business, University of Guelph

Submitted on 14 January 2010 for presentation at the CIRA/ACRI - CRIMT Conference at Université Laval, Québec, Canada, as per the ‘extra-thematic call’ for papers.

Abstract

Statistics Canada’s Workplace and Employee Survey (WES) dataset has been collected and released for 1999 to 2006, and will no longer be extended. The advantage of the WES is that it contains an extensive number of job and individual variables for Canadian workers, including many important elements of work schedules. Over the past several years, our research team has undertaken a research project exploring several of these elements. The purpose of this study is to look at work schedule trends over time among four sub-groups of interest, essentially representing less privileged females and males versus more privileged females and males. The scheduling variables are: workweek length (separated into ‘short’ & ‘long’ part-time, and ‘short’ & ‘long’ full-time), weekend hours, unsocial hours, late schedule notice, and/or flextime. While it is difficult to categorize work schedules lengths as being inherently good or bad, it is fair to presume that late schedule notice or weekend/unsocial hours are generally negative to workers, while access to flextime programs is generally positive.

The inspiration for this study continues to be Betcherman and Lowe’s (1997) analysis of the Canadian labour market. At that time, they identified a number of worrying trends, including the polarization of working conditions. They outlined three scenarios for the future for Canadian workers. In essence, the message was that average working conditions might deteriorate or improve, the conditions for less (more) privileged workers are almost certainly going to deteriorate (improve). In our recent studies (e.g. Zeytinoglu, Cooke and Mann, 2009) and those by others (e.g. Saunders, 2003), it has been established that relatively powerful workers in Canada have higher quality jobs with relatively good pay, hours, and other conditions while less powerful workers are much more likely to be stuck in jobs with relatively poor working conditions. We believe that among the most important variables in determining power in the labour market is attained education. In this study, we also sort workers according to gender since previous studies (e.g. Cooke, Zeytinoglu, and Mann, 2009; Cranford, Vosko, & Zukewich, 2003; Vallée 2005) indicate that females have a higher prevalence of non-standard work arrangements, especially of the less desirable variety.

For this particular study, WES data from 1999, 2001, 2003, and 2005 have been utilized. THE WES is a ‘linked’ dataset in which data from employee microdata (from survey answers from employees) are matched to workplace (i.e., employer) microdata. However, since the unit of analysis in our study is at the individual worker level, we primarily use employee data. For this presentation, data analysis will be
restricted to descriptive statistics in a variety of forms. This approach is appropriate to visually highlight the scheduling elements that have varied or remained constant, over this time period. In addition to the scheduling variables mentioned above, other key variables are: education, wage level, job satisfaction, and the receipt of employer-provided training, retirement/pension plans, and other non-wage benefits. These variables are used to identify the sub-groups of workers in Canadian who can be classified as being relatively more or less privileged.

Although data analysis is ongoing, some preliminary findings are available. At first blush, and when looking at trends among all Canadian workers, it appears that there has been little variability in these work schedules between 1999 and 2005. When considering only job characteristics of less privileged females, it appears that the prevalence of part-time schedules is high and increasing, as is the prevalence of negative scheduling elements (see above). Fairly similar conditions exist among less privileged males, except that the prevalence of these negative schedules elements is lower and more stable. As expected, the prevalence of part-time schedules and the negative scheduling elements are much lower among more privileged workers. One unexpected observation, though, is that less than half of Canadian workers have access to flextime programs, and this proportion is actually stable or declining, including apparently among privileged females. This is a possible sign of an overall decline in employment conditions in Canada over this time period, which is certainly a topic being debated in the mass media as well. That said, our preliminary results reaffirm that despite evolutionary changes, more powerful, educated workers have more favourable work schedules, on average.

Keywords: flexible work schedules, work hours, job quality, gender, education, non-standard work arrangements

References


