

STABLE SCHEDULING STUDY

HEALTH OUTCOMES REPORT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Waiting to find out if you're going to be called in to work any given day, having to rearrange your life to fit around your work schedule, and working a different number of hours every week are stressful realities of retail work today. Even worse, the stress caused by the unstable, unpredictable schedules can interfere with retail workers' ability to get good sleep. Quality sleep is a cornerstone of health: it is essential for physical and mental well-being, cognitive skills, and even good parenting. In addition to the stress of unstable schedules that makes it difficult to maintain healthy sleep routines, retail workers may lose sleep over their finances.

The common perception is that workers in retail are just students picking up beer money, so scheduling instability is not a problem. Our data on retail workers suggest that this is often untrue. This study shows that many retail workers are working to support themselves—and that scheduling instability means that many hourly retail workers lack necessities even as basic as food.

We conducted a randomized experiment of a multi-component, store-level intervention designed to provide workers with more stable schedules. This report focuses on worker health and well-being—both the hardships facing workers before the intervention was implemented and improvements due to the intervention.

This study was conducted at Gap Inc. The experiences reported by Gap workers are not unique and mirror those reported by retail workers in other studies.¹ By examining multiple aspects of well-being, our findings further understanding of the challenges retail workers face as they strive to manage multiple responsibilities and earn an adequate living.

1. Henly & Lambert, 2014; Schneider & Harknett, 2016; 2019.

Worker Experiences at Baseline (before intervention implementation)

SLEEP, HEALTH, AND STRESS

- On nights they worked, workers slept an average of 6.2 hours.
- 47% of workers reported that their work schedule interfered with their sleep.
- 60% of workers had physical symptoms (stomachaches, headaches, etc.) unrelated to a medical condition in the past week. This type of psychosomatic symptom may be a sign of stress.

WORK-LIFE CONFLICT

- 56% of fathers and 39% of mothers had to cancel an event or appointment in the past three months that was important to their child because of their schedule at the Gap.
- 28% of students found it difficult to coordinate their classes with their work schedules.

FOOD INSECURITY AND FINANCIAL INSECURITY

- 51% of workers reported at least moderate food insecurity in the past month.
- 12% were late on rent or mortgage payments in the past three months.
- 26% were late on utility payments in the past three months.
- 19% delayed going to the doctor or getting prescriptions filled because of financial concerns in the past three months.

EFFECTS OF THE INTERVENTION

- Self-rated sleep quality improved by 6-8% on average as a result of the intervention.
- Mixed evidence of a decrease in psychosomatic symptoms, stress, and financial insecurity.



As in our first report, “Stable Scheduling Increases Productivity and Sales,” we focus on average treatment effects, that is, on differences between control and treatment stores overall (Williams, Lambert, Kesavan, et al., 2018). As documented in our prior report, the intervention produced only a modest shift toward stability, and perhaps as a result, we find few average treatment effects on workers’ health and well-being.

The most robust effect of this intervention is on sleep quality, which is central to worker health and well-being. Research documents that poor sleep quality and sleep deprivation impede the ability to retain new information, and the ability for creative thinking—which means that the retail jobs many young people take to help support themselves through college may undermine their ability to learn. Recent research also documents that poor sleep quality and sleep deprivation have negative short- and long-term effects on health, including raising the risks of cancer, cardiovascular disease, strokes, and heart attacks, and obesity.² Worker sleep deprivation hurts employers as well, costing companies over \$411 billion per year in the United States.³

After the pre-pilot stage of our study, Gap rolled out two changes company-wide: elimination of on-call shifts and increased advance notice. Workers were in favor of the changes, and commented on the positive health and work-life benefits.

Our findings help inform two ongoing debates.

The first is the debate over scheduling legislation that is sweeping the country: several cities and two states have enacted or proposed scheduling legislation. This report’s findings on sleep-deprivation and poverty among retail workers will be of interest to policymakers considering such legislation.

Businesses themselves are also becoming increasingly interested in shifting to more stable scheduling because of new information that doing so can increase both sales and labor productivity.⁴ This report adds an important dimension to the business case for more stable schedules. Recently, Walmart implemented two components of stable scheduling: core scheduling and tech-enabled shift swapping.⁵ This move, which will impact more than one million workers across the country, shows that businesses are realizing that stable scheduling is in fact a better business model.

The high rates of food insecurity, and long-term negative health effects of sleep deprivation highlight that a move to more stable scheduling is not just about profits; it’s about corporate social responsibility. Stable scheduling is an ethical issue that also has concrete business benefits: it’s a win-win.

2. Cappuccio, Cooper, D’Elia, Strazzullo, & Miller, 2011; Chaput et al., 2010; Fernandez-Mendoza et al., 2012; Haus & Smolensky, 2013.

3. RAND Corporation, 2016.

4. Ton, 2014; Williams et al., 2018.

5. Nassauer, 2018.