

JOURNAL OF POVERTY

DEDICATION

To the memories of

Frederick Douglass (1818–1895)
Jane Addams (1865–1930)
Michael Harrington (1928–1990)
Pioneers in the continuing “rediscovery”
of poverty and inequality.

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Volume 14, Number 1, 2010

Journal of Poverty

Articles

- X 1 Poverty and Other Factors Affecting Migration Intentions among Adolescents in Mexico
David Becerra, Maria Gurrola, Cecilia Ayón, David Androff, Judy Krysik, Karen Gerdes, Loraine Moya-Salas, and Elizabeth Segal
- X 17 Nonstandard Work and Economic Crisis: What Changes Should We Expect?
H. Luke Shaefer
- 33 Expecting the Worst: Exploring the Associations Between Poverty and Misbehavior
Laura Smith, Alizab Allen, and Rashidah Bowen
- 55 Intersectional Perspective and Rural Poverty Research: Benefits, Challenges and Policy Implications
Adele N. Norris, Anna Zajicek, and Yvette Murphy-Erby
- 76 Regulating the Reproduction and Mothering of Poor Women: The Controlling Image of the Welfare Mother in Television News Coverage of Welfare Reform
Maura Kelly
- 97 Personal and Political?: Exploring the Feminization of the American Homeless Population
Tara N. Richards, Tammy S. Garland, Vic W. Bumphus, and Roger Thompson

Thoughts on Poverty

- 116 The “Greatest Good”: The U.S. Political System and the Uphill Battle for Progressive Health Care Reform
Vanna Gonzales

Nonstandard Work and Economic Crisis: What Changes Should We Expect?

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Many workers experience nonstandard work arrangements, such as being part time, an independent contractor, or working non-daytime hours. This article reviews existing literature and presents primary data on the United States' nonstandard workforce to make predictions about its possible growth during the current economic crisis. Analyses suggest substantial but temporary growth in the involuntary part-time workforce, as well as continued long-term growth of part-time primary earners. There will likely be a cyclical decline in temporary-help employment, contrasted with continued long-term growth of independent contractors. Existing research does not suggest growth in the prevalence of nonstandard schedules.

KEYWORDS *nonstandard work, low-wage work, economic recession*

INTRODUCTION

An important labor market change that may result from the current economic crisis is variation in the prevalence of some forms of nonstandard work in the United States. A large proportion of workers experience one or more nonstandard job characteristics, such as being part time, contingent, an independent contractor, or working non-daytime hours. This article presents primary data on the size and characteristics of the nonstandard workforce, and reviews existing literature to make predictions about its likely growth during the current economic crisis. It uses data from three Current Population Survey (CPS) supplements: (a) The 2008 Annual Social

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and Economic (ASEC) Supplement, (b) the 2005 Supplement on Contingent and Alternative Work Arrangements (CW supplement), and (c) the 2004 Work Scheduling (WS) Supplement. Analyses suggest substantial but likely temporary relative and absolute growth in involuntary part-time work, as well as continued long-term growth of part-time workers who are primary wage earners. There will likely be a cyclical decline in temporary employment, which has come to act as a "shock absorber" during economic slowdowns (Peck & Theodore, 2007), contrasted with continued relative growth of independent contractors. In terms of nonstandard schedules, there is little evidence to suggest rising prevalence over time.

Background

Macroeconomic theory of business cycles tells us that during recessions many firms will seek to cut labor costs, most obviously through cutting jobs (Mankiw, 2002). Job losses have been substantial so far during the current economic crisis. Between December 2007 and June 2009, total payroll employment in the United States fell by \$6.5 million, leading to a national unemployment rate in June of 9.5%, the highest for that month since 1983. The unemployment rate in June was even higher among people of color, reaching 14.7% among Blacks, and 12.2% among Hispanics. Cutting jobs, though, is not the only way to reduce labor costs (Lambert, 2008; Mankiw, 2002). Firms also can cut workers' hours or change their utilization of other nonstandard work arrangements. Nonstandard work encompasses a large and heterogeneous group of employment characteristics, and firms and workers have many different reasons for using them. Thus understanding how the utilization of nonstandard work changes with business cycle fluctuations is a critical question. Specifically, a detailed look at the different forms of nonstandard work is necessary to understand how they will be affected by the current economic crisis.

The best source for nationally representative data on the nonstandard workforce is the Current Population Survey, a monthly survey of approximately 60,000 households collected by the U.S. Census Bureau for the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). It offers a nationally representative sample of the non-institutionalized U.S. population. Detailed labor market and demographic variables are available for all adult respondents, ages 16 and older. The CPS also includes additional supplements in certain months. The CW supplement collects data on nonstandard work statuses (most recent data available from 2005), and the WS supplement collects data on nonstandard work schedules (most recent data available from 2004). Data from both of these supplements were extracted by the author using dataferrett. Data from the ASEC Supplement include annualized variables on part-time work. They were extracted by the author from the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS; King et al., 2004). One limitation of CPS estimates

is that they use survey responses from workers instead of firms. Therefore, there may be some differences between the official employment statuses and those reported on the CPS. Unfortunately, there are no nationally representative monthly surveys of employers that provide the same level of detail, and so CPS data offer the best available way to measure the nonstandard workforce. Most estimates presented below were generated by the author, although some are official estimates generated by BLS.

The Size and Heterogeneity of the Nonstandard Workforce

According to CPS estimates, just under 30% of the U.S. workforce had some form of nonstandard status in 2005. This includes workers who were part-time, temporary, an independent contractor, or an on call employee, among others. This means roughly 41 million workers in the United States fell into a nonstandard status category in 2005. About 17% of workers—roughly 24 million—worked a majority of their hours outside of the daytime workday, including evening, overnight, or irregular hours. Thus, workers with nonstandard characteristics make up a substantial proportion of the U.S. workforce.

This large group encompasses a heterogeneous population of workers and work arrangements. Gleason (2006) writes, "care must be taken to avoid generalizations about the impact these highly varied employment arrangements have on workers" (p. 6). Still, it is widely recognized that there are some problems associated with many of the forms of nonstandard work. Perhaps most important is the lack of availability of important social welfare benefits. Many groups of nonstandard workers are unlikely to have access to employer-based health insurance, an employer pension program, or unemployment insurance upon entering a spell of unemployment (Blank, 1998; Wenger, 2006). Since low-wage workers are particularly likely to experience nonstandard characteristics, this is an issue of special importance to scholars focused on anti-poverty policies (Shaefer, 2008). Thus, in the context of the current economic crisis, it is important to consider possible changes in the relative size of the nonstandard workforce and the implications of these changes.

NONSTANDARD JOB STATUSES

Kalleberg and his colleagues (2000) define nonstandard status employment as "employment relations other than standard, full-time jobs, including part-time employment in an otherwise standard work arrangement, day labor and on-call work, temporary-help agency and contract-company employment, independent contracting, and other self-employment" (p. 258). Table 1 offers concise definitions of official nonstandard job statuses recognized by

TABLE 1 Nonstandard Employment Statuses, Proportions for U.S. Adult Workers, Ages 16 and Older

Job status	Definition	Proportions
Part-Time Workers, Traditional	Workers with 1–34 work hours at all jobs in a week. Commonly referred to as traditional part-time work.	15.1
Independent Contractors	Independent contractors work with clients to provide goods and services and include consultants and freelance writers among others. They overlap considerably with the self-employed.	7.4
Direct Hire Temporary Workers	These workers are hired directly by the firm and not through a temporary-help agency.	2.8
On-Call Workers	Employees who work only when needed and are called-in for work hours by their employer.	1.8
Temporary-Help Agency Workers	Typically employed in short-term positions, placed by a labor force intermediary.	0.9
Workers Provided by Contract Firms	Workers provided to projects by contract firms. Highly concentrated in construction and public administration.	0.6

Sources: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2005, Current Population Survey, Supplement on Contingent & Alternative Employment Arrangements. Estimate for direct hire temporaries comes from Polivka, Cohany & Hipple, 2000.

the Bureau of Labor Statistics (U.S. Department of Labor, 2005). Each non-standard status is described in greater detail below.

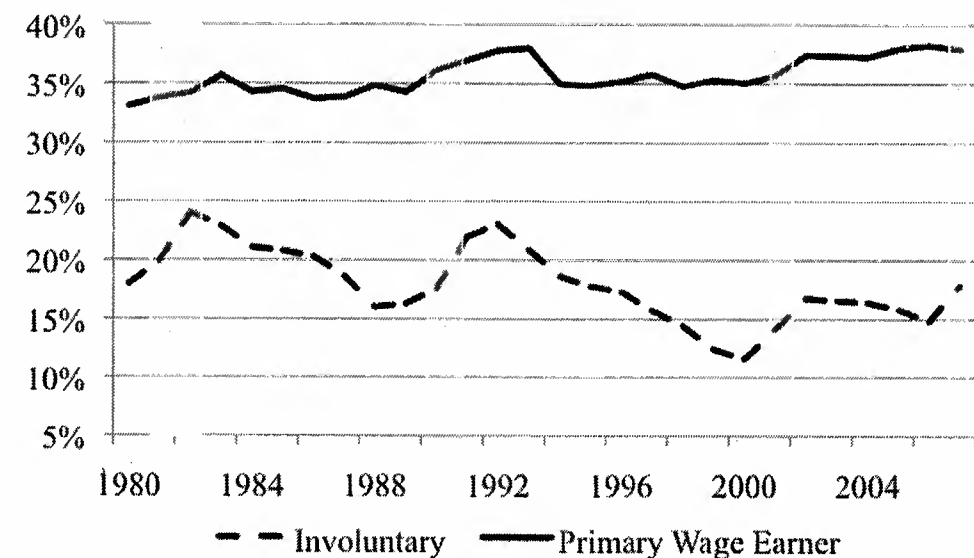
Part-Time Workers

The largest group of nonstandard status workers is part time, traditional workers, accounting for roughly 15% of total employed in 2005. Part-time workers are typically classified as those who work between 1 and 34 hours each week. Part-time workers are considered traditional if they do not have other nonstandard status characteristics. BLS estimates show that part-time workers tend to be younger than full-time workers, although they are also disproportionately likely to be older as well, near or of retirement age. Part-time workers are concentrated in the service sector, in industries such as retail, social services, and food services. Women are far more likely to work part time than men. Most studies also find that part-time workers earn less than comparable full-time workers, although some researchers suggest this is untrue within certain populations, such as highly educated women (Blank, 1998).

The BLS subdivides part-time workers into those who report non-economic (voluntary) reasons for working part-time hours, such as child

care problems or competing family obligations; and those who report economic (involuntary) reasons, such as slack work or inability to find a full-time job. Over 80% of part-time workers reported voluntary reasons for their hours for 2007. Given this, it would be easy to conclude that most part-time workers choose their hours and, as such, do not present a policy concern. For some this may be true. For others, the story may be more nuanced. The majority of non-economic reasons included on the CPS have to do with intervening family or personal demands. Therefore, many part-time workers may not necessarily choose part-time hours simply because they prefer them to full-time hours, no matter the circumstances. Rather, many may choose part-time hours because intervening family or life circumstances rule out full-time work, or at least substantially raise the opportunity cost of full-time employment. This is sometimes referred to as “constrained choice” (Walsh, 1999). For example, a single mother might prefer to work full time. However, because of childcare costs, she might “voluntarily” work part time because full-time work without adequate childcare is less appealing to her.

Figure 1 presents a time series of the proportion of the part-time workforce reporting involuntary reasons for their hours. It also presents a new time series of the proportion of part-time workers who are primary wage earners, a distinct group that includes both voluntary and involuntary part-time workers (Shaefer, 2009). Considering the implications of constrained choice, this may be an important alternative way to think about the part-time workforce. Secondary earners depend on another earner as their primary source of income, while part-time primary earners may be a relatively

**FIGURE 1** Part-time workers in the United States—Adult workers, ages 16+.

vulnerable nonstandard group. For this analysis, part-time workers are considered primary earners if their earnings accounted for 50% or more of their family's earned income.

As Figure 1 makes evident, both groups experience counter-cyclical growth, increasing in relative size during economic recession. There is, however, no long-term growth in the relative size of the involuntary part-time group as a proportion of the part-time workforce. Thus, the current economic crisis will undoubtedly see a substantial increase in the size of the involuntary part-time workforce, and in fact, the number of workers reporting involuntary part-time work almost doubled between December 2007 and June 2009. However, if long-term trends hold, this will be a short-term jump that will stabilize with a future recovery. In contrast, the proportion of part-time workers who are primary wage earners is substantially larger than the involuntary group, accounting for nearly two in five part-time workers in 2007. Further, there appears to be a slight but consistent upward trend in the proportion of part-time workers who are primary wage earners over the past few decades.

The part-time workforce has already and will continue to grow during the current economic crisis, and the proportion of part-time workers who are involuntary will grow as well. However, this involuntary group will likely return to being a relatively small proportion of the part-time workforce after the recession. The proportion of the workforce that is primary wage earners is also likely to grow during the recession. If current trends hold, though, this group is likely to continue growing as a proportion of the part-time workforce. Both of these groups experience significant social welfare challenges, including high risk of poverty, difficulty accessing unemployment insurance, high risk of going without health insurance, and low rates of pension coverage (Shaefer, 2009). However, the involuntary group appears to represent a problem in the short-term, and less of one in the long-term, while primary wage earners represent a larger and growing problem of which policy makers should be aware.

Independent Contractors and Contract Firm Workers

Independent contractors are the second largest group of nonstandard status workers, making up 7.4% of total employed in February 2005. Independent contractors work directly with clients to provide goods or services and include consultants, freelance writers, and Web designers, among other occupations. Independent contractors overlap considerably with the self-employed (U.S. Department of Labor, 2005). This is the only category of nonstandard status workers to increase in size relative to the total workforce between 1997 and 2005.

Independent contractors are disproportionately likely to be White and male and tend to be "highly educated individuals who work in relatively high-paying management, business, and financial operations occupations"

(U.S. Department of Labor, 2005, p. 5). They also prefer their nonstandard status to a traditional arrangement by large margins (nine to one). Currently there is concern that many firms are misclassifying workers as independent contractors in order to save on tax and benefit costs. This has recently become an area of contention between some firms and the Internal Revenue Service (Coens & Storrs, 2006).

Independent contractors are likely to grow in relative size during the current economic crisis, continuing recent trends. These are skilled workers providing services that may be harder for firms to cut than unskilled jobs. During an economic downturn, the benefits to firms of classifying their workers as independent contractors will only grow. Growth of this group will have an ambiguous effect on workers. While independent contractors are less likely to access employer-based benefits, a large majority of them prefer their arrangement to a traditional one. However, if this group continues to grow as firms substitute more independent contractors for traditional arrangements, this may become less true.

A somewhat similar but separate group of nonstandard status workers are those provided by contract companies, making up 0.6% of employment in 2005. Men make up over two-thirds of this group, and these workers are more likely to be people of color than those in traditional arrangements. A large proportion of these workers are employed in construction or public administration, and the group appears stratified, with both low-skilled and high-skilled workers. Construction is one of the industries hit most heavily in recent months, with industry employment falling by over 15% during the recession. The economic stimulus package (the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act) may lead to an uptick in this sector, however, it will likely only slow the pace of job loss until a recovery.

Temporary Workers

Temporary agency jobs are one form of nonstandard work that has gained much attention in recent years. In February 2005, roughly 1.2 million workers worked for a temporary-help agency, accounting for around 1% of total employment (U.S. Department of Labor, 2005). The Bureau of Labor Statistics cautions that this may overstate the number of workers who depend on temporary-help placements because it may also include permanent temporary-help agency staff. After more than tripling in size during the 1990s, temporary-help agency work as a proportion of total employed has remained relatively constant this decade. Temporary-help agency workers tend to be younger than full-time traditional workers, are more likely to be people of color, and are less likely to have a high school diploma. Unlike part-time workers and independent contractors, CPS results suggest that a majority of temporary-help workers are involuntary and would prefer a traditional work arrangement (U.S. Department of Labor, 2005).

Another important type of temporary worker is direct-hire temporaries, defined by Polivka and her colleagues (2000) as "individuals who were in a job temporarily for an economic reason and who were hired directly by a company rather than through a staffing intermediary" (p. 43). The CPS CW supplement does not ask questions directly about this category. However, Polivka and colleagues (2000) use a series of variables from the supplement to identify this group and find that direct hire temporaries make up roughly 2.8% of total employed. Polivka (1996) estimated that this group was slightly larger in relative size in the early 1990s. Like temporary-help agency workers, direct hire temporaries are, on average, younger and less educated than full-time traditional workers. However, they are not more likely to be people of color (Polivka et al., 2000).

A final related group is made up of 2.5 million on-call workers, who account for just under 1.8% of the employed. These are workers who report that they work only when needed and are concentrated in construction, education, and health services industries. Like temporary workers, on-call workers are, on average, younger and less educated than traditional workers. Their median weekly compensation was a bit higher than temporary-help workers, but well below that of independent contractors. About half of the 2005 CPS CW supplement respondents who indicated they were on-call workers reported that they would prefer a traditional arrangement.

If recent history is any guide, these temporary help arrangements as a whole are likely to contract during the current economic downturn. Peck and Theodore report that workers in the temporary-staffing industry (TSI) accounted for roughly one-quarter of the net job losses during the 2001 recession. They argue that this industry now "performs a 'shock absorber' function, enabling businesses to externalize the costs of economic fluctuations" (p.175). This cyclical volatility undoubtedly has serious implications for affected workers, most of whom would prefer a more traditional arrangement.

Other Nonstandard Groups

A related, but distinct category of workers is "contingent." The U.S. Department of Labor (2005) defines contingent workers as "those who do not have an implicit or explicit contract for ongoing employment" (U.S. Department of Labor, 2005, p. 2). Depending on the operationalization, contingent workers account for between 2 and 4% of total employed.

Nonstandard statuses collected in the CW supplements do not account for some other types of nonstandard employment status characteristics. Today, especially among low-wage workers, there is some evidence that the divisions between full-time and part-time workers are less distinct than in the past (Henly & Lambert, 2005). Workers in some industries such as retail today find themselves classified into categories besides full time and

part time, including "full-time flex" (Henly, Shaefer & Waxman, 2006). Workers with such a status may be less likely to access social benefits and may be subject to a greater degree of variability in their timing and total number of work hours.

Reasons for Nonstandard Job Statuses

The earlier descriptions highlight the heterogeneity of nonstandard status workers—a group that ranges from independent contractors, who tend to be older, White, and well compensated, to temporary-agency workers, who are likely to be younger and of color, and to receive low wages. Such heterogeneity might also suggest that these nonstandard statuses are used for very different reasons. On the worker side, for example, 90% of independent contractors report that they prefer their arrangement to a traditional one, while fewer than one in three temporary-help agency workers report the same. As for firms, Blank (1998) finds that companies may prefer nonstandard statuses because they help in controlling costs in three ways: (1) they help in dealing with variable consumer demand; (2) they allow firms to cut labor costs through lower wages and fewer fringe benefits; and (3) they allow them to quickly adapt to changes in the larger economic environment (see also Lambert, 2008; Mishel, Bernstein, & Allegretto, 2005). Finally, Blank finds that companies sometimes use nonstandard statuses as a way to screen workers for full-time positions. The reasons that employers use part-time workers may be somewhat different from the other nonstandard statuses. In a large survey of employers, Susan Houseman (2001) found that only one in five employers reported that they hired part-time workers to save on wages and benefit costs. In contrast, more than half reported that they used part-time hours to manage scheduling issues.

NONSTANDARD WORK SCHEDULES

Whether or not a worker has a nonstandard job status, their work schedule may depart from standard daytime hours. Thus, another way that nonstandard employment manifests itself is in nonstandard work schedules. Henly et al. (2006) summarize major survey findings, concluding that, on the whole, "working nonstandard hours is statistically significantly associated with work-family role conflict, low marital quality and stability, and reduced time spent with children" (p. 610). Even workers who voluntarily choose nonstandard schedules may experience heightened risk of these negative outcomes.

Table 2 compares results from the CPS WS supplements for available years: 1997, 2001, and 2004. In 2004, about 15% of full-time workers and 28% of part-time workers reported working a non-day schedule. These proportions are somewhat lower than in 1997, when 17% of full-time

TABLE 2 Work Schedules Among U.S. Workers, Adults Ages 16+ (Cells in Percentages)

	Full-time			Part-time		
	1997	2001	2004	1997	2001	2004
Daytime Schedule	83.0%	84.4%	85.3%	64.0%	69.7%	72%
Any Non-day schedule	17.0	15.6	14.7	36.0	30.3	28.0
Evening	4.3	4.5	4.4	12.8	15.0	14.2
Night	3.2	3.1	3.0	2.6	2.4	2.2
Irregular schedule	3.6	3.4	3.7	9.2	8.4	7.3
Split or Rotating Shift	3.6	2.7	2.9	5.4	3.2	3.8
Other	2.5	0.9	0.8	6.0	0.9	0.6
Variable Hours	7.1	7.3	7.4	13.7	12.2	12.9

Source: Author's analysis of CPS WS Supplement Data.

workers and 36% of part-time workers reported a non-day schedule. If weekend hours are included as nonstandard, Presser (2003) estimates this raises the proportion of U.S. workers with nonstandard schedules in 1997 to roughly 45%. Among the non-day schedules, the most common appears to be evening shifts, worked by 4.4% of full-time workers and 14.2% of part-time workers. While these limited data are not conclusive, they give no indication of growth in the proportion of workers with non-day hours across these 3 years.

While the overall occurrence of evening and night work declined during this period, Hamermesh (1999, 2002) analyzes WS supplement data and concludes that work on the fringes of the standard business day—such as a cashier who clocks in at 5:30 a.m. or a sales associate who works until 7:30 p.m.—has increased over the past few decades. Further, Hamermesh also finds that low-wage workers are far more likely to work nonstandard hours on the fringes of the workday than workers with higher wages (1999, 2002). Henly et al. (2006) qualitative study illustrates how Hamermesh's findings play out in the lives of low-wage workers. They interviewed a purposive sample of 54 low-wage workers who were mothers employed in retail in Chicago and found that "study participants commonly work hours that cross over into early morning or late evening," even when their typical schedule consisted of standard work hours (p. 617–618).

Variability in the Timing of Work

Henly and her colleagues also find that 40% of the daytime workers in their sample reported working a schedule that included "at least one evening or night shift in addition to their daytime hours" (Henly et al., 2006, p. 618). This highlights another common characteristic of nonstandard schedules: variability in the timing and number of work hours. In his examination of WS Supplement data from 1997, Golden finds that 30% of U.S. workers have

variable start and end times (Golden, 2001). The final row of Table 2 shows the proportion of all U.S. workers who report that their total hours fluctuate too much to report a typical number. This proportion holds steady over the period 1997 to 2004 with slightly over 7% of full-time workers reporting variable hours and about 13% of part-time workers reporting the same.

An important question is who controls this scheduling variability? *Employee-driven* flexibility refers to a worker's ability to control his or her schedule by changing start and end times, or total hours of work. Much of the existing literature focuses on how increasing levels of such employee-driven flexibility can augment workers' ability to manage conflict between their work and family life (Fenwick & Tausig, 2004; Golden, 2001; Golden, 2005). Golden, however, finds that "flexible scheduling opportunities remain disproportionately denied to certain workers with characteristics arguably most in need of such arrangements" (Golden, 2005, p. 52).

Lambert contends that variable schedules among low-wage workers are often the result of *employer-driven* flexibility, and are better represented as instability rather than flexibility in the lives of workers (Lambert, 2008). Moss, Salzman, and Tilly (2005) find in their in-depth case studies of 36 companies across a number of industries that employers put a premium on hiring workers who are willing to have flexible and irregular hours that can be set and changed to accommodate business needs.

The bifurcation of jobs characterized by *employer-*versus *employee-driven* flexibility follows a pattern similar to the overall stratification of the U.S. workforce. Workers with valued skills and assets in high demand have been able to use that leverage in the labor market to demand employee-driven scheduling flexibility. The large pool of low-skilled workers, however, is more subject to employer interests in cutting labor costs, and research suggests that unpredictable schedules are a common way that employers seek to do that (Lambert, 2008).

LONG-TERM CHANGES IN THE RELATIVE SIZE OF THE NONSTANDARD WORKFORCE

Kalleberg cautions that "nonstandard employment arrangements are not new" (p. 342), and other historical analyses emphasize that the majority of jobs prior to the Post World War II era had nonstandard characteristics (Pfeffer & Baron, 1988). In terms of growth in nonstandard work during the past few decades, Gleason writes that "although companies historically have used nonstandard workers, the relatively rapid growth rate of these workers in a wide range of industries and occupations has become pervasive" (Gleason, 2006, p. 1). Documenting changes in the size of the nonstandard status workforce is made difficult by the fact that many of the detailed data sources were not collected until the 1990s. Therefore, a lack of comparable

data makes it hard to draw firm conclusions about the growth of nonstandard work over time.

Much has been made about the growth of temporary employment, due to the fact that the temporary-help supply industry more than tripled in size during the 1990s (Estevão & Lach, 2000). However, temporary employment declined during the early years of the current decade and has remained stable in relative size since then. Mishel, Bernstein, and Allegretto (2005) contend that one unique feature of the post-2001 recession recovery was the growth in "just-in-time" employment practices. They report that "13% of all jobs created since the jobless recovery ended are in the temporary employment industry. This is a significant increase in the use of temporary employees and corroborates the growth of just-in-time employment practices" (p. 271). However, evidence from the CPS CW supplement suggests that the overall relative size of the temporary-help agency workforce changed little between 2001 and 2005.

Changes in the Prevalence of Nonstandard Schedules

As previously discussed, Hamermesh finds that "American data from 1973 through 1997 show that the amount of evening and night work in the United States has decreased" (p. 601). He further concludes that this "did not result from industrial shifts or demographic changes" (1999, p. 37) and was more the result of advantaged workers substituting away from performing work during undesirable times. Fenwick and Tausig (2004) compare results for full-time workers from the 1977 Quality of Employment Survey (QES) with the 1997 National Study of the Changing Workforce (NSCW), which was designed to be comparable to the QES. They find that "those who reported working nonday shifts actually declined from 12% to just over 7%, but this may be an artifact of differences in the way nonday shifts are computed in our analysis" (p. 94). As previously discussed, Hamermesh finds that the occurrence of work done during the fringe hours of the standard workday has increased over time. In fact, he finds that "the decline in work in the evenings and at night was more than offset by the growth in work at the 'fringe times' in which work had previously been performed less frequently" (1999, p. 64).

DISCUSSION

Existing research suggests that workers with nonstandard employment characteristics make up a substantial portion of the U.S. workforce. Survey research finds that both nonstandard status and nonstandard hours are associated with a wide range of negative outcomes, including low job quality, work-family conflict, and low marital stability (Fenwick & Tausig, 2004;

Kalleberg et al., 2000; Presser, 2003; Staines & Pleck, 1986). Vulnerable workers are disproportionately likely to have nonstandard work characteristics and are especially likely to be vulnerable to the negative consequences associated with them. It is also true, however, that some nonstandard workers choose their arrangement over more traditional ones, and some value the added flexibility that nonstandard work sometimes allow. Clearly it is important in future research to more clearly distinguish between employee-driven schedule flexibility, in which workers exert control over their work, and employer-driven scheduling flexibility, in which firms introduce variability into the schedules of low-wage workers in an effort to cut labor costs.

The data presented in this article suggest that some nonstandard groups may grow in prevalence during the current economic crisis. Analyses suggest substantial—but likely temporary—growth in involuntary part-time work, as well as continued long-term growth of part-time workers who are primary wage earners. There will likely be a decline in temporary-help employment. In contrast, the long-term relative growth of independent contracting will likely continue beyond the recession. In terms of nonstandard schedules, there is little evidence to suggest relative growth during the recession. It is important to note that these analyses are limited in an important way: they assume that the current economic crisis—while perhaps more severe—is comparable to previous recent recessions. It may be that the current crisis more closely resembles a depression, and this might mean that predictions based on recent historical data will prove inaccurate.

Of particular concern is how nonstandard work characteristics affect access to the U.S. social safety net. Wenger (2006) writes that many nonstandard workers—advantaged and disadvantaged alike—may experience undesirable social benefit outcomes because they "are caught in the penumbrae of policies developed for full-time workers" (Wenger, 2006, p.169). Blank (1998) contends that the most common problem of nonstandard jobs is "their lack of fringe benefit coverage, particularly the lack of health insurance and private pension funds" (p. 284; see also Kalleberg, 2000; Gleason, 2006). She goes on to write that "the unavailability of unemployment insurance to self-employed contractors and to many part-time or temporary workers who work limited hours or switch jobs frequently may exacerbate the economic uncertainty" of nonstandard work (p. 284). Be they good or bad, nonstandard work arrangements, on the whole, put workers at greater risk of going uninsured, falling into poverty, going without employer-based pension coverage, and experiencing a spell of unemployment without unemployment insurance.

While the current economic crisis is fraught with risks for nonstandard, and indeed all, workers, it may also be a period of opportunity for public policy reforms. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) included incentives for states to expand eligibility for Unemployment Insurance that may help part-time workers access benefits. This would help

one group of nonstandard workers, although some others—including temporary workers and independent contractors—would likely still face considerable barriers to access. Current health care reform proposals under consideration might make it more affordable for workers without access to employer-based health insurance to get health coverage (Baucus, 2008). Certainly making it more affordable for workers to purchase public or private insurance from sources other than their employer would help on this front. Two keys to this would be (a) creating a new public health insurance program in which nonstandard workers could buy in, with adequate subsidies for low-wage workers; and (b) extending the tax benefits enjoyed through employer-based plans to other private insurance plans. This is an important time to be vigilant: these policies are likely to change as they make their way through Congress and federal and state implementation. Rigorous analyses of how policy reforms would affect social benefit access for nonstandard workers are critical, both in the current economic crisis and in the long term. Making sure that new programs and policies adequately serve nonstandard workers will be an important role for anti-poverty scholars and advocates.

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