

The post-industrial era has brought with it changes in the temporal nature of labor force activity among rich countries—notably a growing diversity in employees' work schedules. *How many* hours a week people are employed and *which hours* in the day they are employed are becoming more varied—not just within countries, but between countries. So, too, are *which days* of the week people are employed.

Researchers have long studied the number of hours per week people work, and are finally giving some attention to people's work shifts—whether they work mostly days, evenings, or nights, or have a rotating schedule. But with few exceptions, there is a virtual absence of knowledge, as well as minimal discourse, about what is happening to employment during the weekend—both Saturdays and Sundays. Yet this aspect of work schedules is an important part of the general erosion of the standard work week in most highly industrialized countries, and has important implications for family functioning and personal well-being.

An important first step in addressing this issue is to establish some demographic parameters on weekend employment—its prevalence and correlates in various countries. These correlates include the potential relevance of such personal and job characteristics as gender, age, marital and parental status, education, whether employed full or part time, work shift, and the occupation and industry one holds. As we report in this paper, the relationships between these variables and weekend employment varies among countries. Why this is so is explored by examining contextual differences among countries—which includes differences in occupational structure, the size of the service sector, union density, and public regulations about weekend employment (including required pay premia).

The present paper examines such aspects of weekend employment by analyzing data for the United States and for 17 European countries, all for the year 2001, except Germany (1997) and the Netherlands (1999). (In subsequent work, we will be studying the trend over a decade in each of these countries, but this is beyond the scope of the current paper.) For the U.S. analysis, we use the May 2001 supplement to the Current Population Survey. For the European analyses, we use the 2001 European Labor Force Surveys (LFS)—except for the earlier years noted for Germany and the Netherlands.

The comparability between studies is good, since the study of weekend work (unlike the study of shift work) is not subject to serious definitional problems; what is meant by Saturday and Sunday is clear to all respondents. Moreover, the sample sizes are large; the CPS includes approximately 50,000 households, and the LFS samples range from 5,000 to over 400,000, depending on the country.

Some striking preliminary findings from these data emerge, such as the general lack of difference between employed parents and nonparents in the extent of weekend employment for most countries, even when restricting the age range of workers—and despite the general lack of formal child care facilities during the weekend. There are some interesting variations among European countries in weekend employment, with usual Saturday employment ranging from about 5 percent of employees in Belgium to about 30 percent of employees in Italy. (Employment during Sundays is generally much lower than employment during Saturdays, the exceptions being Denmark and Sweden, which both have about 17% of all employees working Sundays—and only slightly higher percentages on Saturdays.) Also of interest is the fact that women are more likely than men to be employed on Saturdays in most of these countries, which is linked to women’s higher percentages working part time, and the fact that weekend employment is more likely among part-time workers.

We conclude our paper with a discussion of some of the contextual differences between countries that help to explain their variations in weekend employment. We also demonstrate that although the U.S. is in the lead in terms of prevalence of weekend employment, some of the European countries are not far behind, despite the greater roles of unions in such countries—and union aversion, generally, to nonstandard work schedules. We argue that even in countries with relatively generous publicly-supplied day care and other family and workplace policies, there is a need to pay more attention to the growth in weekend employment and how to alleviate the constraints this may impose on employed parents and their children.