

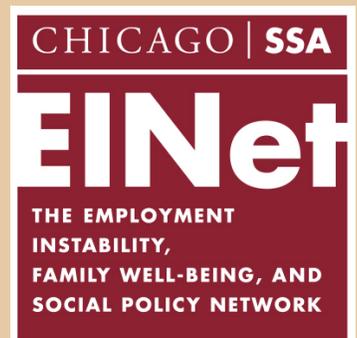


# Measuring Long, Overtime, and Un-Preferred Hours of Work

A WORKING PAPER OF THE EINet MEASUREMENT GROUP

Lonnie Golden | Pennsylvania State University

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**The Employment Instability, Family Well-being, and Social Policy Network (EINet)**

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EINet provides a venue for scholars and professionals to interact, collaborate, and develop new research infrastructure to better understand the causes and consequences of employment instability. EINet is particularly concerned with promoting research about instability in the low-wage labor market and its effects on family well-being.

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# MEASURING LONG, OVERTIME, AND UN-PREFERRED HOURS OF WORK

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One of EINet's primary aims is to advance the conceptualization and measurement of (in)stability among those who are employed. Thus, it is crucial to include the working-hours component of instability as one of its many dimensions. Unstable, unpredictable, or unanticipated hours of work have direct and indirect effects on workers' incomes and on their ability to attend to family and personal matters outside of work. Thus, a composite index of the insecurity of employment ought to include fluctuations in working hours, particularly when they are at least somewhat undesirable. It is well-documented that working-hour fluctuation is intensified among those jobs considered contingent (Wenger & Kalleberg, 2006; Belman & Golden, 2001; Golden & Appelbaum, 1992). Instability of work hours may reflect some element of choice on the part of workers, however it is more a reflection of lack of choice (Lambert, Fugiel, & Henly 2014; Frase & Gornick, 2012). While many have examined this phenomenon and the adverse consequences of unanticipated reductions in hours, some have also focused on the unwelcome extra hours (Golden & Wiens-Tuers, 2008; Costa, Sartori, & Akerstedt, 2006). Together, they provide a powerful, broader picture of the incidence and impact of working hours that may cycle both downward and upward.

This working paper will summarize, contrast, and critique a wide range of existing survey items that measure work hours, work hour preferences, overtime, and extra work hours. The focus will be on measurements of hours of work per week, although work hours per day and per year also may be relevant. It will summarize, from both regular and one-time surveys, the items that could prove most useful in measuring instability in workers' hours, and some of their potential shortcomings. In particular, it will focus on the measures of involuntary, unwelcome, or unpreferred work hours, especially, but not exclusively, among workers with long hours. Along the way, it will suggest possible adjustments to existing items that would improve the way work hours, the nature of overtime work, and work hours preferences could be included in future national surveys. For example, it will suggest adding follow-up questions to work-hours items that might get at the perceived ability to refuse additional work hours, request a shortening of work hours, and fear of sanctions, jeopardy, or retaliation for such refusals or even for such requests. These measures might help us advance the discussion on whether working long or overtime hours is voluntary or involuntary.<sup>1</sup> It will help inform us about what items to include in two upcoming supplements to the General Social Survey (GSS): the Quality of Work Life and Work Orientations IV modules. This discussion would link the measures directly to proposed legislative initiatives, in particular those that would institute a legal, protected right to refuse mandatory overtime work and a right to request adjustments to work schedules or hours (e.g., pro-rated, part-time hours), including that some of the compensation for overtime work be in the form of future compensatory (comp) time off, which indicates a preference for fewer future work hours.

## CURRENT MEASURES: WEEKLY HOURS OF WORK

Estimates of long hours among workers derive mainly from two types of questions—usual hours in some frame of time, such as the last year, or actual hours in a recent time period, such as the last week.<sup>2</sup> Questions refer to the number of hours worked on a weekly basis. Some report raw numbers of weekly hours some recode the number into ranges, while others just ask for hours within pre-determined brackets, such as 35 to 39 hours. The reference period used may differ between surveys, so there may be variation in reported hours to the extent that recall is sensitive. Moreover, there is often a discrepancy between the usual and actual hours worked, for example, due to seasonal fluctuation factors, absences, sick time, paid time off for vacation and holidays, breaks, and so on. Some analyses purport to show that the Current Population Survey (CPS) overestimates hours of

work (particularly among those who work very long hours), as is evidenced by the American Time Use Survey (ATUS), which uses a daily time diary from a given respondent's previous day. Nevertheless, the veracity of the CPS estimates has been confirmed, yielding hours estimates not statistically significantly different from those garnered from the ATUS (Frazus, 2014).<sup>3</sup> Thus, any bias in using the CPS is small, and its hours of work are not overestimates.

It is generally agreed that the relatively least problematic reference period is "this last week" (as opposed to "this week" or "last year") and that "usual" hours are more informative than "actual" hours and are more reliable when exploring potential correlates. The CPS actual hours of weekly work question may be relatively less indicative, e.g., because it includes whether someone was taking paid or unpaid sick time, which of course, reduces reported actual work hours. On the plus side, actual hours will include overtime or extra hours worked in the last week. (This would also be consistent with most European Union labor survey questions.) The Work, Family, and Community Nexus (WFCN) Survey (Heymann, Putnam, Earle & Sander, 2008), is a large, nationally representative survey of 2,500 American adults aged 18–69, conducted in 2005–06.

Typical of most surveys, the WFCN asks:

How many hours a week do you usually work, at all jobs?

Standard polls use similar language in national surveys of adults (with  $n = 623$  to almost one thousand), such as Rasmussen Reports (December 11–12, 2013), but use a range rather than an open-ended question (with recoding into ranges):

How many hours a week do you typically work? Less than 20 hours per week, 20–30 hours, 30–39 hours, 40 hours, 41–50 hours, or more than 50 hours?

It appears to be best to ask about one's usual hours currently or at a recent time. However, it is possible to get more respondents if the hours question is asked not only of those who are currently employed, but those who may have been employed sometime in the last year, which would require asking about usual hours per week in the last year or when these workers were last employed. Also, because respondents may often work extra hours, the question should be appended with, "paid hours that you are usually scheduled, not including any (paid or unpaid) extra hours" (National Study of the Changing Workforce [NSCW]).

In the CPS, there is an option to respond, "it varies." The percentage of workers answering in this way may be as high as 9 percent, or at least one in eleven workers, a non-trivial proportion. The "it varies" issue can be largely addressed with a follow-up question to impute an estimate of the mean of "usual" hours. Finally, if a given survey already asks about both usual and actual hours, it would be useful to ask, "What was the reason for the discrepancy?" In order to include non-hourly workers who report varying hours, workers' usual hours are estimated using a regression-based imputation procedure, predicting the usual hours of work for "hours vary" cases based on usual hours worked with similar characteristics (Mishel, et al, 2012).

The Work-in-America Survey (WIA) adds a nice wrinkle (Q43) to the work hours query:

In your main job, about how many hours per week are you usually scheduled to work at a minimum?

Unionized workers were more likely to be in the (coded) range of 31 to 40 hours, leaving nonunion workers more prevalent at the lower ranges of 11 to 20 and 21 to 30 hours and also slightly more at 41 to 50 and 51 to 60 hours.

Interestingly, the WIA asks the minimum hours question (Q44) before the more standard question about actual hours:

And how many hours did you actually work at this job in the last full week you worked?

It finds that 20 percent of union and 25 percent of nonunion workers actually worked 41 to 50 hours, and 11 percent of union and 9 percent of nonunion workers worked 51 to 60 hours. This leads us right in to our next subject.

## OVERTIME HOURS

An imperative extension of the hours-worked question is the issue of overtime hours. The challenge here is that overtime is a context-specific and value-laden term based on formal laws and regulation, as well as more informal norms. Overtime refers to working beyond some standard, regular, or normal number of hours per week. This may not translate consistently across workplaces, occupations, time periods, or countries. It is much more clearly defined for nonexempt workers than for typical salaried exempt workers, because of hours tracking and payment owed.

From the GSS Quality of Work Life (QWL) supplement, appended in 2002, 2006, and 2010 (and 2014, to be released later in 2015):

[In your main job], How many days per month did you work extra hours beyond your usual schedule?

*Enter days #* \_\_\_\_\_

In the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY) questionnaires, individuals are asked:

At this job, did you usually receive overtime pay?

(Prior to 1994, it estimated overtime work from the question, “Did you work overtime at this job?” but felt that the former better defined the meaning of ‘overtime since the latter left the interpretation of that term up to the discretion of the respondent [Dembe et al., 2005].)

Since many of the adverse consequences on employees’ reported well-being (such as work stress, work–family conflict, injuries, happiness, etc.) are associated with the lack of control or choice regarding work hours (Berg et al, 2004; Lyness et al, 2014) and, in particular, unscheduled hours, it was key that the QWL includes the immediate follow-up question:

When you work extra hours on your main job, is it mandatory (required by your employer)?

*Yes (1); No (2)*

Over a quarter of the GSS sample were employed (varying between 26 to 28 percent, depending on the year of the survey). Most, but not all, of the workers surveyed indicated that they worked overtime in the previous month and that it was required by their employer (answering yes to the question about having actually worked at least a day of extra hours in the prior month, bringing the total working mandatory OT to about 21 percent). The follow-up question about whether the overtime is required by the employer is useful in that it precludes the possibility that a respondent associates the overtime work with the nature of the job. It is intended to capture the nature of the extra work and, in particular, whether or not it is purely voluntary.<sup>4</sup>

In the WIA survey (Friedman & Lotto-Casner, 2003), a slightly different question appears:

What’s your situation at work with regard to overtime? Do you have NO overtime, VOLUNTARY overtime opportunities that you can refuse without penalties, or MANDATORY overtime? (Q10)

Only 29 percent of union and 38 percent of nonunion employees had no overtime, while as many as 49 percent and 43 percent, respectively, had voluntary overtime opportunities that they could refuse without penalties. Up to 19 percent of the unionized and 15 percent of nonunion workers regarded their overtime work as mandatory.

For purposes of insecurity of work, a useful question then follows:

Is your mandatory overtime usually scheduled far enough in advance that you are able to plan for it, or is it usually scheduled at the last minute and hard to plan for? (Q10B)

The majority (53 percent of union workers and 56 percent of nonunion workers) reported that their required overtime work was usually scheduled at the last minute and hard to plan for, whereas the proportion stating that it was scheduled far enough in advance that they were able to plan for it was at 41 percent for both sets of workers. In addition, 6 percent of union and 3 percent of nonunion workers volunteered that it was, “sometimes one and sometimes the other,” or, “it changes,” or something similar.

A crucial follow up question to include in the future, pertinent to income insecurity (Fair Labor Standards Act [FLSA] compliance and violation), in the WIA (Q45), would be:

Are you paid for all the extra hours you work at this job beyond your normal schedule, only for some of the extra hours you work, or for none of the extra hours you work?

Up to 74 percent of union workers and 63 percent of nonunion workers were paid for all extra hours worked. Interestingly, 6 percent of union workers and 3 percent of nonunion workers were paid for only some of the extra hours they worked, while the remainder were paid for none of their extra hours of work (17 percent of union workers and 29 percent of nonunion workers).

The WFCN survey asks a similar, but somewhat more specified question:

In your current job, how often are you REQUIRED to work extra or overtime hours with little or no advanced notice (4–12)? (If the respondent needed a definition of “required,” the interviewer offered, “Does your supervisor ASSUME that you will be available to work extra hours without asking you first?” Or, “Are you made to feel that if you don't work extra hours when asked, you could lose your job or hurt your chances for job advancement?”)

*Never; Less than once a month; Once a month; Once a week; Two to three times a week; Four to seven times a week.*

Because the WFCN survey focuses on the perception of potential consequences of working conditions and of using flexible working arrangements, it later asks respondents:

Does working overtime when required and when little or no advance notice (“overall,” and then, “make each of the following,” *more difficult, less difficult, or make no difference?* [e.g., time with family, child care arrangements]).

In a one-time national survey focusing on overtime work, largely blue-collar, unionized workers in six industries were asked first if they worked some overtime and then if the motivation for working overtime was “voluntary,” “as “job insecurity,” “financial strain,” or because there was “supervisory pressure” (Cornell University Institute for Workplace Studies, 1999). Two-thirds of the workers worked overtime. About 18 percent reported that it was because of supervisory pressure. (A similar question is asked in the monthly CPS, Outgoing Rotation Group [quarter sample]).

Those who responded either “all” or “some” to the previous question were then asked an interesting (for public policy) preference question:

If you had a choice, would you rather be paid time-and-a-half for overtime hours or get [future] time

off at a time-and-a-half rate for the overtime hours you work?

In the National Study of the Changing Workforce (NSCW), representatives of organizations are queried regarding their perception of whether their organizations provide employees with an ability to:

Have control over paid and unpaid overtime hours?  
(at least some employees = 45%; all or most employees = 25%)

In addition, organizations are asked if they provide various flexible work arrangements, including reduced time options, such as those allowing employees to:

“Move from full-time to part-time work and back again [while remaining in the same position or level]”  
(at least some employees = 36%, all or most employees = 6%)

The WFCN survey asks a key, useful follow-up question, which allows a more nuanced view of how voluntary or involuntary these arrangements are (4–22)

For this question we are interested in the personal cost to you of taking this benefit, not whether it is a benefit at your workplace: For each of these policies can you tell us whether it is available to people at your workplace to use without any penalty or cost at work, with a small penalty or cost at work, with a large penalty or cost at work, or not available at all? (for interpretation, the interviewer offered, “a small penalty or cost...means a person’s supervisor being unhappy with you and a large penalty or cost means, for example, a person might risk sacrificing future promotions).

In sum, a lack of choice regarding working extra hours is a key component of unstable, fluctuating, or insecure work and, sometimes (with the exception of most salaried employees), income. By asking about extra hours, a survey would not exclude exempt, salaried workers who have no legal entitlement to overtime pay but have a notion of some standard or expected hours of work.<sup>5</sup> In addition, it would not exclude the extra work of part-time workers who are putting in more than their implicitly expected hours, albeit less than 35 or 40 hours. Questions such as whether the worker would prefer to be compensated in cash or (future) time off also probe into the underlying motivation for working extra hours. If they are taken on toward a purpose of having future reduced work time or time off, this would provide an underexplored, unique angle.<sup>6</sup> Flexibility vs. unwelcome variability of extra work hours is more about external than internal pressure, as important as the latter might be. A possible additional question of value—and reflection of inflexibility—would be if a worker believed he or she was legally entitled to receive overtime pay but did not (e.g., due to off-the-clock work, underpayment, or employer misclassification of a job as exempt), but this could be reasonably teased out if the question allows the respondent to answer that some but not all overtime work was paid for, provided that the survey already contains the standard battery of questions regarding job title or classification and hourly/salaried pay status (such as the CPS, GSS, and WIA).

## **WORK HOURS PREFERENCES, MISMATCH, INCONGRUENCE**

Long or overtime hours, undesired overtime hours, overemployment, and overwork (generating symptoms) are similar but distinct concepts (see Appendix, Figure 1), and need to be measured separately, with possible overlap recognized. Most surveys attempt to gauge hours preferences and whether there is a mismatch present, asking something like:

Thinking about the hours you work, assuming that you would be paid the same amount per hour, would you prefer to work fewer hours, work more hours or continue the same hours?

This is useful in estimating the incidence of *overemployment* (currently working beyond one’s preferred hours) or *underemployment* (wishing to work additional hours), and their extent in the work force at a given point in

time. It specifies the potential trade off of income and time, although it implies, perhaps unrealistically, that the reduction would be proportional. In fact, however, it may be more than proportional given employee benefits, and also that the increase would be proportional when in fact it may be more so because of overtime pay premia. In terms of measuring preferred hours, the Australian Labor Force survey, HILDA, asks,

If you could choose the number of hours you work each week, and taking into account how that would affect your income and your life on and off the job, would you prefer to work [fewer hours per week; more hours per week; work the same hours per week that you usually do; can't choose]?

However, it does not attempt to identify the degree of overemployment or underemployment experienced, which might be even more useful. One survey (Workplace and Employee Survey (WES), 2002, in Canada, Q12a) actually does ask of those who selected “fewer hours,” “By how many hours would you like to reduce your [hours per] [work] week?” A reworded version of the same question could be asked of those who prefer more hours. Another one-time survey asked, “If it is or were available, would you seriously consider using the option [of shorter work hours] right now (at this point in your life): probably use in the future; consider using in the future; would not consider using” (Hart, 2003). Not surprisingly, but still tellingly, about 15 percent indicated “right now,” but a much higher proportion, 42 percent, indicated that they would consider it in the future, say, in a year or two down the road. Thus, respondents may not wish the immediate income impact, but many more might be able to adjust, if planned, to fewer hours in exchange for lower income in the somewhat near future.

Some experts feel that this question is too restrictive and/or too unspecific (see Reynolds & Aletraris, 2010). It is subject to many inferences workers might make about the repercussions of reduced hours (Campbell & van Waanroy, 2013). Nevertheless, any question that attempts to measure actual hours vis-à-vis some preferred or ideal hours (see NSCW) is also potentially problematic, not only for the possible inferences regarding the impact on current income.<sup>7</sup> Preferences for work hours are formed within a complex set of motivations and within a wide range of circumstances in one’s occupation, workplace, and household (see Golden, 2009). Such preferences, indeed, are adaptable. In particular, there may be a preference to work longer than one’s ideal hours.<sup>8</sup> For example, if workers are forward-looking, they might consider a “heavy investment in work” (Harpaz & Snir, 2014). Working more hours may be expected to deliver a higher wage trajectory by development of specific human capital, which in turn increases chances for promotion, wage increases, non-wage benefits, or career trajectory (Booth et al., 2003).<sup>9</sup> The greater is the disparity in earnings, the stronger is the incentive to increase hours of work (Michelacci and Pijoan-Mas, 2007).<sup>10</sup> In addition, workers who feel they are treated kindly or fairly, for example those who are paid well, are more inclined to wish to work more to reciprocate (backward-looking incentives).<sup>11</sup>

The challenge of respondent inferences regarding feasibility and repercussions, which are involved with expressing stated preferences for hours and reductions, might be overcome, to a degree, by a series of questions that first establish the degree of satisfaction, then the preference among choices, generally then more specific. The WIA asks for respondents’ views on different kinds of scheduling options that one might or might not have available at one’s work. The key question of interest here is,

How about the option to adjust your schedule so you could work 90% of a full-time schedule for 90% of wages and 90% of benefits, 80% of full-time schedule for 80% of wages and 80% of benefits, and so on through 70%, 60%, etc.?

About 15 percent (slightly higher among nonunion workers) said they have an option similar to this at work. However, another 6 percent of union and 10 percent of nonunion workers said, “don’t know.” When asked if they had ever used this option, 38 percent of union and 29 percent of nonunion workers said they had.

Other surveys make no mention of trade-offs or encourage respondents to report what they might imagine what they would do in a hypothetical context consisting only of extreme changes (e.g., the NSCW, some GSS questions, start from the worker's ideal and then seek to find out why workers don't choose these hours if they are fewer than their current hours). The above question from the WIA, by contrast, encourages workers to focus on what they want, given their current situations. It starts off by suggesting satisfaction with hours, including the possibility that people who want to work the same hours are nonetheless dissatisfied with the trade-offs they have to make. It encourages workers to at least state (if not reveal) what they prefer now, at this job and this point in their life cycle, rather than what they might prefer in some hypothetical situation and then asks about the future. In the event some people may have trouble indicating exactly how many hours they want to work, it first solicits the preference that most people should be more easily able to decide, whether they want to work more or fewer hours. Most importantly, it then explicitly provides the direct, immediate sacrifice of income that is general enough to apply to all workers. Some experts feel that this is still too broad, so it then specifies in more concrete terms the trade-offs workers would be making (e.g., a 10% reduction in pay for a 10% reduction in hours, which translates into a half-day off per week).<sup>12</sup>

Finally, two recent YouGov polls ask questions from which we might detect the rates of both overemployment and underemployment, and how they may vary across worker types (Belkin, 2013). About 18 percent said that they would take the opportunity to work one less day each week and receive 20% less pay (another 15 % said they were not sure, which could put the overemployment rate at about one-quarter of the employed). When repeated the following year (July 22–23, 2014), YouGov subdivided it into four questions; one of the most pertinent is:

Work less, paid less: If you had the opportunity to work one less day each week and receive 20 percent less pay, would you take that opportunity?

The total answering yes was 15%, slightly lower than the previous year. Another 17% said they “were not sure,” so the total of both was identical to the prior year. Not surprisingly, the rate was higher among those in the upper income bracket, though curiously higher in the the \$80–100k family income bracket than in the above \$100k family income bracket. Even more curiously, the rate was noticeably higher among part-time than among full-time employed (13% and 25%, respectively).

Indeed, there may be a great irrationality in the labor market today, because the next question asked:

Work more, paid more: If you had the opportunity to work one more day each week and receive 20 percent more pay, would you take that opportunity?

A whopping 52% said yes, plus another 20% were not sure. By employment status, this indicator of underemployment came in similarly, at 50% for part-time and 52% for full-time workers (among working students, it was up to 59%).

The great irrationality is the persistent, and surprisingly consistent, rate across surveys such as these, pointing to a coexistence of one-quarter of the employed preferring fewer work hours along with six in ten preferring more hours. Indeed, it is not so clear-cut as part-time versus full-time, but within each category there is both underemployment and overemployment. A pressing need, thus, is to estimate the incidence, rate, and distribution of unwelcome overtime hours and overemployment generally, as well as that of underemployment (beyond the “part-time for economic reasons” estimates from the monthly CPS). Tracking these with regular frequency in surveys would help to identify opportunities to implement policies and practices that might shift hours of work within workplaces, occupations, industries, and the labor force so as to improve the well-being of workers in both groups simultaneously

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