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journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/socscimedParents' work patterns and adolescent mental health[☆]Alfred Dockery^{a,*}, Jianghong Li^{b,c}, Garth Kendall^{c,d}^a Curtin Business School, Curtin University of Technology, GPO Box U1987, Perth, WA 6845, Australia^b Centre for International Health, School of Public Health, Curtin University of Technology, Perth, WA 6845, Australia^c Telethon Institute for Child Health Research, Centre for Child Health Research, University of Western Australia, Australia^d School of Nursing and Midwifery, Curtin University of Technology, Perth, WA 6845, Australia

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ABSTRACT

Previous research demonstrates that non-standard work schedules undermine the stability of marriage and reduce family cohesiveness. Limited research has investigated the effects of parents working non-standard schedules on children's health and wellbeing and no published Australian studies have addressed this important issue. This paper contributes to bridging this knowledge gap by focusing on adolescents aged 15–20 years and by including sole parent families which have been omitted in previous research, using panel data from the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia Survey. Multilevel linear regression models are estimated to analyse the association between parental work schedules and hours of work and measures of adolescents' mental health derived from the SF-36 Health Survey. Evidence of negative impacts of parents working non-standard hours upon adolescent wellbeing is found to exist primarily within sole parent families.

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Background

Several factors have contributed to the advent of around-the-clock economies. Technological change has led to a dramatic growth of the service economy that requires more around-the-clock employees than does manufacturing based industry (Presser, 2003, pp. 3–7; Presser, 2004). This economic shift has, in turn, increased consumer demand for

continuously available services. As Strazdins, Korda, Lim, Broom, and D'Souza (2004, p. 1518) have observed, globalisation mandates that employers must hire workers to meet increasing service demands as a result of "the global movements of people, goods, and information across time zones and national borders." Another factor is the deregulation of the labour market over the last decade, which itself may be driven by increases in consumer demands for around-the-clock services (Presser, 2003).

In her book, "Working in a 24/7 Economy", Presser (2003) shows that 40 percent of the American labour force works mostly in the evenings, overnight, on rotating or variable shifts, or on weekends. In 1997, 28 percent of dual-earner married couples in the United States had one spouse working late or rotating shifts and 25 percent of dual-earner couples with a child under 5 had a parent working such a schedule. These percentages are higher among low-income couples, families under financial stress and single mothers (Presser, 2004, p. 3).

These labour market trends are also evident in other developed economies. In 13 European Union countries,

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9.7–22.2 percent of all employees worked evening and night hours (Presser, 2003, pp. 46–49). The percentage of total employees who work weekends in Europe ranges from 11.4 percent for Belgium to 33.1 percent for Italy, a prevalence higher than that of the United States. In Canada, about one-third of the labour force works non-standard hours on a regular basis (Akyeampong, 1997), and in three quarters of dual-earner couple households with children aged between 2 and 11 years, one or both parents regularly worked non-standard hours (Strazdins et al., 2004).

Existing research in Australia has found that the proportion of employees who worked some of their hours at night or on the weekend in the previous four weeks increased from 56 percent in 1993 to 64 percent in 2000; 33 percent of employees regularly work overtime and 13.9 percent worked shift hours in the previous four weeks in 2000 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2002). Table 1 presents data from the first four waves of the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia Survey, the data used in this study. Among persons who hold only one job, 25.2 percent of workers regularly work weekends and 14.6 percent regularly work some form of shift work. In total, 42.7 percent regularly work some form of non-standard hours. The incidence of all forms of non-standard work is higher among part-time workers, of whom more than half work non-standard schedules.

The arrival of a 24/7 economy has changed the organisation of work and the pattern of labour force participation of parents, thus reshaping the interface between work and the family (Strazdins et al., 2004). A number of studies have found evidence of negative impacts of working non-standard hours upon the health of workers themselves, although results are by no means unanimous (Ulker, 2006). A substantial body of literature demonstrates that working non-standard work schedules has a negative impact on the stability of marriage and family cohesiveness (Presser, 2003, pp. 80–109; Presser, 2004). This in turn has consequences for children (Strazdins et al., 2004; Strazdins, Clements, Korda, Broom, & D'Souza, 2006). Yet, only a limited amount of research has investigated the effects of parents working non-standard schedules on children's health and wellbeing and no published Australian studies have addressed this important issue.

There is some evidence from previous studies that non-standard employment of parents is associated with poor child outcomes in terms of cognitive abilities (Han, 2002),

educational outcomes (Heyman, 2000), behavioural problems (Bogen & Joshi, 2001) and self-esteem among girls (Barton, Aldridge, & Smith, 1998). Strazdins et al. (2004), the first comprehensive study of the association between parents' non-standard work and children's wellbeing, found that children from parents who worked non-standard times are more likely to have emotional and behavioural problems. This association persisted after adjusting for parental socioeconomic status, parent part-time versus full-time work, childcare use and regardless of whether it was the mother, father or both parents who worked non-standard times.

There may also be positive effects of parents working non-standard hours, depending on the family structure and which parent is working non-standard hours. Barnett and Gareis (2007) have shown that in some American dual-earner families fathers whose wives work evenings versus days spend more time with children, know more about children's activities, receive more disclosures from children, and have better parenting skills. Parents' non-standard work may have a positive effect on children because parents earn a higher income to afford better education and recreational activities for children. Arguably, the positive and negative effects of parents working non-standard hours may offset one another, such that there is no significant net impact on children.

Some limitations of previous studies are the exclusion of single-parent households, one-earner or non-earner households, and of variables capturing the intensity of work (number of hours worked). Yet, the percentage of parents working non-standard schedules is even higher among low-income couples, families under financial stress and single-parent families (Presser, 2004, p. 3). By omitting single-parent and one-earner households, previous research may have cropped a key element of the picture of parents' non-standard work patterns and children's wellbeing. A further limitation of previous studies is that they did not separate different types of non-standard schedules. Presser's (2004) longitudinal analysis has shown that it is night (very late hours) and rotating shifts that significantly increase the risk of separation and divorce for couples with children.

Finally, the relationship between parents' non-standard hours of work and adolescent health and wellbeing has not been examined in previous research. It has been suggested that the impact of parents' non-standard work may depend on the age of the child: young children may be affected more than adolescent children because the former have a greater need for physical care and constant supervision and are thus more dependent on their family (Strazdins et al., 2006).

However, adolescence is a critically important period of human development and adolescents face greater challenges than younger children in terms of their changing identities, social relationships, sexuality, risky behaviours, education and taking on adult work roles. On top of these special needs, adolescents are also in a phase of rapid and far-reaching changes which create a mixture of complex challenges, freedoms, uncertainties and opportunities (Lawrence, 2005), and for many the dissolution of the primary social institution (e.g. family). What distinguishes adolescence from childhood and hence makes the former

Table 1
Incidence of non-standard work, employed persons 2001–2004.

	Night shift	Other shift ^a	Weekends	Any non-standard schedule ^b	Obs
Employed full-time	1.3%	10.3%	24.3%	37.8%	20,647
Employed part-time	3.3%	18.5%	27.5%	54.0%	8825
All employed	1.9%	12.7%	25.2%	42.7%	29,472

Notes: persons with multiple jobs excluded.

^a Includes regular evening shifts and rotating daytime and night or evening shifts.

^b Includes previous columns plus split shifts, being on call, 'irregular schedule' and workers who selected 'other' rather than 'regular daytime schedule'.

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