



**NATIONAL  
WOMEN'S  
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# **Part-Time Workers Are Paid Less, Have Less Access to Benefits – and Most Are Women**

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**Almost 33 million working people in the United States—about one in five—work part time.** Many people work part time to support their families while caring for loved ones, going to school, or attending to other obligations, but are penalized for choosing part-time work in terms of pay, benefits, stability, and opportunities to advance. And for many others, working part time isn't a choice at all: some employers, particularly in low-wage service industries, rarely offer full-time positions, and some employees—especially women—find that caregiving or other responsibilities preclude full-time work.

## **Who are part-time workers?**

### **MOST PART-TIME WORKERS ARE WOMEN.**

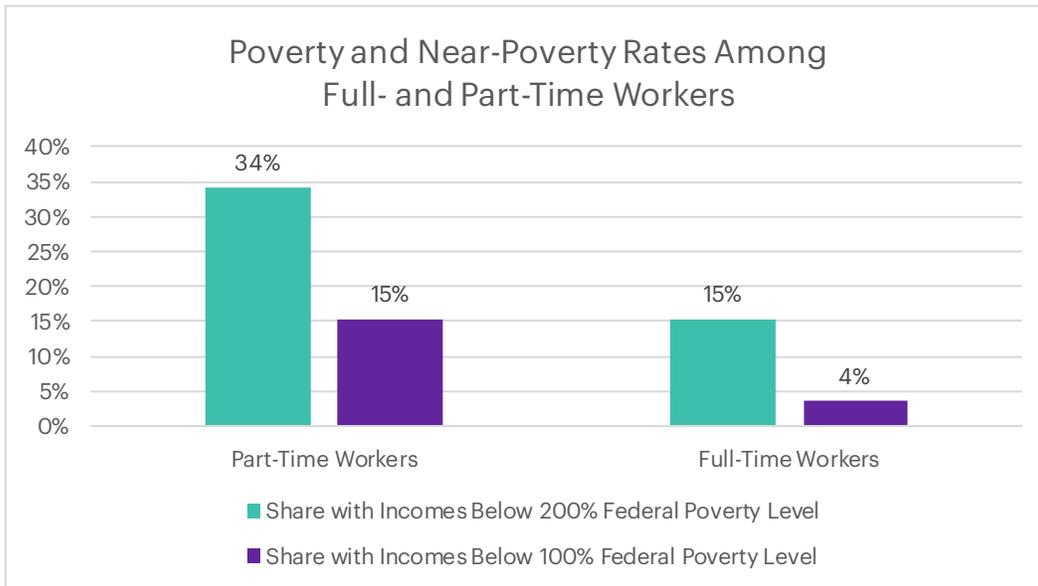
- 32.9 million people work part time—approximately one in five workers (21 percent).<sup>1</sup>
- More than six in ten part-time workers (63 percent) are women.<sup>2</sup>
- Compared to men, women are almost twice as likely to work part time: 28 percent of all working women are part time, compared to 15 percent of all working men.<sup>3</sup>
- More than one in five part-time workers (23 percent) are women of color, compared to 18 percent of all workers.<sup>4</sup>

### **PART-TIME WORKERS ARE ESPECIALLY LIKELY TO WORK IN LOW-PAID JOBS AND STRUGGLE TO MAKE ENDS MEET.**

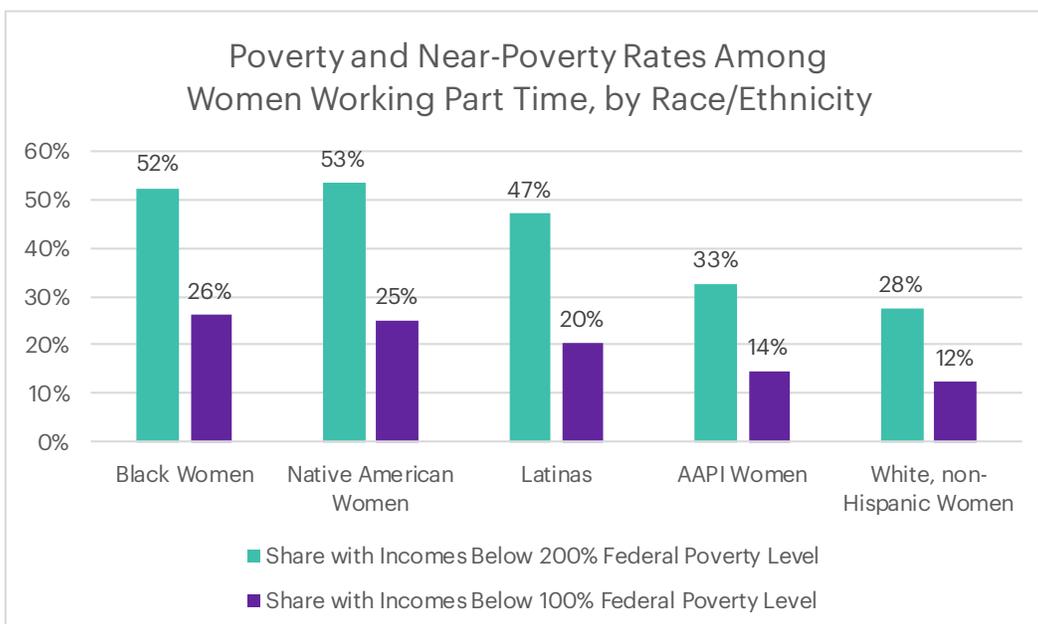
- Part-time workers are more than three times as likely as full-time workers to hold low-paid jobs (defined as the 40 lowest-paying occupations in the U.S.). Nearly seven in ten part-time workers in low-paid jobs (69 percent) are women.<sup>5</sup>
- About one in seven part-time workers (15 percent) lives in poverty—over four times the rate of poverty experienced by full-time workers.<sup>6</sup> And the federal poverty line—which is just \$20,231 for a parent

with two children<sup>7</sup>—barely begins to capture what families need to make ends meet. For example, the Economic Policy Institute estimates that a family of that size living in Columbus, Ohio would need more than three times a poverty-level income (\$67,180) to maintain a basic but adequate standard of living.<sup>8</sup>

- About one-third of all part-time workers (34 percent) live near poverty, with household incomes below twice the poverty line, compared to 15 percent of all full-time workers.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, among all women working part-time, 34 percent have household incomes below twice the poverty line, including 15 percent who live in poverty.<sup>10</sup>
- Women of color working in part-time jobs are especially likely to live paycheck to paycheck. About half of Black women (52 percent), Native American women (53 percent), and Latinas (47 percent) working part time, and one-third (33 percent) of Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) women working part time, have incomes below twice the poverty line.<sup>11</sup> One in four Black and Native women working part time, and one in five Latinas working part time, lives in poverty.<sup>12</sup>



Source: NWLC calculations based on U.S. Census Bureau, 2018 American Community Survey



Source: NWLC calculations based on U.S. Census Bureau, 2018 American Community Survey

### **MOST PART-TIME WORKERS ARE AGE 25 AND OLDER.**

- Nearly seven in ten part-time workers (69 percent) are age 25 and older, and only 13 percent are teens age 16 to 19.<sup>13</sup>
- More than two in five part-time workers (43 percent) are age 25 to 54 – that is, prime working age. Nearly seven in ten part-time prime-aged workers (69 percent) are women.<sup>14</sup>
- About one in four part-time workers (26 percent) are age 55 and older. Six in ten older part-time workers (60 percent) are women.<sup>15</sup>

### **MANY PART-TIME WORKERS ARE SUPPORTING FAMILIES.**

- Nearly one in four part-time workers (23 percent) have children under 18. The vast majority (80 percent) of these parents working part-time are women.<sup>16</sup>
- More than one-third of mothers working part-time (34 percent) are supporting children on their own.<sup>17</sup>

### **PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES ARE MORE LIKELY TO WORK PART TIME THAN PEOPLE WITHOUT DISABILITIES.**

- Nearly one-third of workers with a disability (32 percent) work part time, while only 20 percent of workers without a disability work part time.<sup>18</sup>
- Nearly four in ten working women with a disability (38 percent) work part time, compared to 27 percent of working women without a disability.<sup>19</sup>

## **Why Do People Work Part Time?**

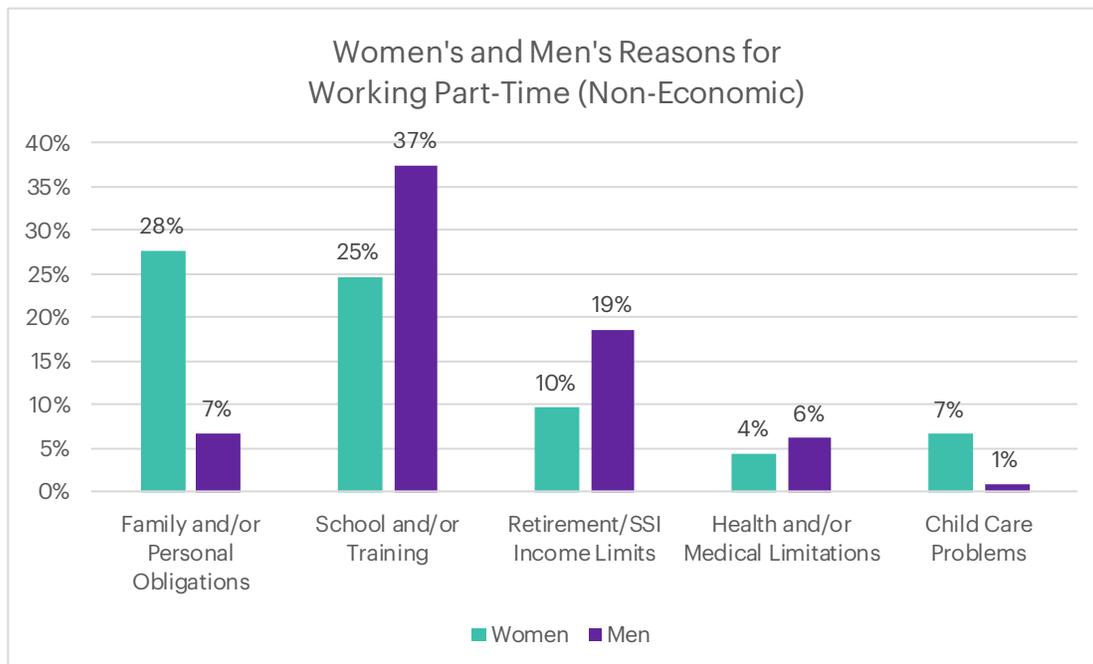
### **MILLIONS OF PART-TIME EMPLOYEES WORK PART TIME BECAUSE THE FULL-TIME WORK THEY ARE SEEKING IS NOT AVAILABLE.**

- More than one in eight part-time employees—4.4 million people—work part time “involuntarily” as defined by the Bureau of Labor Statistics,<sup>20</sup> which considers part-time work to be involuntary when it is for “economic reasons” including business conditions or the inability to find full-time work.<sup>21</sup> About half of employees who work part time involuntarily are women.<sup>22</sup>
- These estimates do not capture people who want to work part time but receive fewer hours than they are seeking from their employer—a scenario that is common in many low-paid service sector jobs. For example, surveys of hourly retail and food service employees in multiple jurisdictions show that among those working fewer than 30 hours per week, at least six in ten typically want to work more hours.<sup>23</sup> New research from the Center for Law and Social Policy shows that up to 40 percent of all people working part time would prefer more hours, including half of people working part time in service occupations.<sup>24</sup>

### **EIGHT IN TEN WORKERS WHO WORK PART TIME DO SO FOR OTHER REASONS, INCLUDING SCHOOL OR FAMILY OBLIGATIONS.**

- More than eight in ten people who work part time (87 percent) do so for reasons other than the unavailability of full-time work—reasons that the Bureau of Labor Statistics terms “noneconomic reasons.”<sup>25</sup> Women are more than six in ten (62 percent) of these workers.<sup>26</sup>

- Employees who work part time for noneconomic reasons do not seek full-time work for a variety of reasons—many of which are not truly “voluntary:”
  - More than 6.2 million workers who are part time for noneconomic reasons (21 percent) report working part time because of child care problems or other family or personal obligations.<sup>27</sup> Women are seven times more likely than men to cite “child care problems” and over four times more likely than men to cite “other family/personal obligations” as reasons for working part time.<sup>28</sup> While some of these workers prefer to work part time, for others the “choice” of part-time work may be forced by, for example, high child care costs or inflexible and unpredictable work schedules.
  - Nearly 6.2 million part-time workers (21 percent) report working part time because they are in school or training.<sup>29</sup>
  - Over 2.8 million part-time workers (10 percent) report working part time because they are retired, or are subject to Social Security income limits and would lose benefits if they worked more.<sup>30</sup>
  - Over 1.1 million part-time workers (4 percent) report working part time due to health or medical limitations.



Source: Megan Dunn, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, [Who Chooses Part-Time Work and Why?](#) (March 2018)

## What Are Key Concerns for Part-Time Workers?

### PAY AND ACCESS TO BENEFITS ARE MAJOR CONCERNS FOR THOSE WHO WORK PART TIME.

- **Employers often pay part-time employees less per hour than full-time employees in the same occupations.** For example, employers pay part-time office and administrative support workers over six dollars per hour less, on average, than their full-time counterparts (\$13.21 per hour for part-time workers, compared to \$19.77 per hour for full-time workers). Similarly, part-time retail and sales workers make less than half what their full-time counterparts make (\$11.19 per hour for part-time workers, compared to \$26.26 per hour for full-time workers).<sup>31</sup> New research from the Economic Policy Institute indicates that, across occupations, part-time workers are paid nearly 20 percent less per hour than their full-time counterparts—and people who say they work part time because they could not find a full-time job face the steepest wage penalty, earning almost 30 percent less than their full-time counterparts.<sup>32</sup>

- **Part-time workers are far less likely to have access to employer-sponsored benefits.** Employers provide just 22 percent of part-time workers with access to medical insurance benefits, compared to 87 percent of full-time workers.<sup>33</sup> Full-time workers are twice as likely to have access to retirement benefits than part-time workers (80 percent of full-time workers, compared to 40 percent of part-time workers).<sup>34</sup> Full-time workers are also twice as likely to have access to paid sick days than part-time workers (86 percent of full-time workers compared to 43 percent of part-time workers).<sup>35</sup>
- **Women who work full time are more likely to be promoted than those who work part time.** A 2014 study of women across their careers found that employers consistently are more likely to promote full-time workers than part-time workers.<sup>36</sup>
- **Part-time workers are more likely to have volatile schedules than full-time workers.** Working part time more than doubles the likelihood of having work hours that vary weekly.<sup>37</sup> And employers are more likely to give part-time employees short notice of their work schedules: for example, among early career workers (age 26 to 32), 48 percent of part-time employees receive their schedules one week or less in advance, compared to 35 percent of full-time employees.<sup>38</sup> This kind of precarious scheduling is associated with material hardship, including difficulties securing adequate food and housing, and makes it even more challenging for working parents to arrange child care.<sup>39</sup>
- **Part-time workers who lose their jobs face specific barriers to qualifying for unemployment insurance in many states, even if they have sufficient earnings to otherwise qualify for benefits.** Jobless workers who are only available for part-time work are ineligible for unemployment insurance in 21 states; another 20 states permit eligibility for workers who are only available for part-time work only if those workers have a history of part-time work.<sup>40</sup>

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1 NWLC calculations based on American Community Survey (ACS) 2018 using Steven Ruggles et al, Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS) USA: Version 9.0 [dataset] (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota, 2019). Figures are for 2018. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) defines part-time work as less than 35 hours per week. See BLS, Handbook of Methods: Current Population Survey, at 4-5, <https://www.bls.gov/opub/hom/cps/pdf/cps.pdf>. This brief offers a profile of workers who usually work less than 35 hours per week, unless it is discussing the distinction between involuntary and voluntary part-time workers. Data on both involuntary and voluntary part-time workers include workers who usually work full time but worked part time during the week the survey was conducted. See *infra* notes 20 and 22.

2 NWLC calculations based on ACS 2018 using IPUMS, *supra* note 1. In the ACS, respondents self-identify their sex as either male or female. For more information, see the ACS 2018 questionnaire: <https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/methodology/questionnaires/2018/quest18.pdf>.

3 NWLC calculations based on 2018 ACS using IPUMS, *supra* note 1.

4 *Id.* Respondents self-identified their race in the 2018 ACS. “Women of color” includes women who self-identified their race in the ACS as something other than white, non-Hispanic.

5 33 percent of part-time workers hold low-paid jobs, compared to 9 percent of full-time workers. *Id.* Low-paid jobs can be defined in a variety of ways. Here they are defined as the 40 occupations with the lowest median hourly wages according to BLS, May 2018 National Occupational Employment & Wage Estimates, [https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes\\_nat.htm](https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes_nat.htm) (last visited Feb. 18, 2020). Median wages in these jobs are all below \$12 per hour.

6 NWLC calculations based on 2018 ACS using IPUMS, *supra* note 1. Among full-time workers, 3.5 percent have incomes below the poverty level. *Id.*

7 U.S. Census Bureau, Poverty Thresholds for 2018, <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/income-poverty/historical-poverty-thresholds.html> (last visited Feb. 11, 2020).

8 See Econ. Policy Inst., Family Budget Calculator, <https://www.epi.org/resources/budget/> (last visited Feb. 11, 2020).

9 NWLC calculations based on 2018 ACS using IPUMS, *supra* note 1.

10 *Id.* Rates of poverty and near poverty for women working full time are also comparable to rates for the workforce overall: among women working full time, the near-poverty rate is 16 percent, including 4 percent with incomes below the poverty line. *Id.*

11 *Id.* Among women working full time, about one-quarter of Black women (26 percent), Native American women (27 percent), and Latinas (27 percent) have incomes below twice the poverty level. About one-tenth of AAPI women (11 percent) and white, non-Hispanic women (12 percent) working fulltime have incomes below twice the poverty level. *Id.* Respondents self-identified their race in the 2018 ACS. Black women self-identified as Black or African American, Native women self-identified as American Indian or Alaskan Native, and AAPI women self-identified as Asian American or Other Pacific Islander. Latinas are those who self-identified as being of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin, and may be of any race. White, non-Hispanic women self-identified as white but indicated that they are not of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin. For more information, see the ACS 2018 questionnaire: <https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/methodology/questionnaires/2018/quest18.pdf>.

12 NWLC calculations based on 2018 ACS using IPUMS, *supra* note 1.

13 *Id.*

14 *Id.*

15 *Id.*

16 *Id.* Parents have at least one related child under 18 in the home.

17 *Id.*

18 *Id.* This figure includes ACS respondents who self-identified as having at least one of the following: self-care difficulty, vision difficulty, hearing difficulty, independent living difficulty, ambulatory difficulty, or cognitive difficulty. For more information, see the ACS 2018 questionnaire: <https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/methodology/questionnaires/2018/quest18.pdf>.

19 NWLC calculations based on 2018 ACS using IPUMS, *supra* note 1.

20 NWLC calculations based on BLS CPS Annual Table 20: Persons at work 1 to 34 hours in all and in nonagricultural industries by reasons for working less than 35 hours and usual full- or part-time, <https://www.bls.gov/cps/cpsaat20.htm> (last visited Feb. 18, 2020). Note that this figure is for 2019, and includes people at work part time during the reference week, rather than those who usually work part time. The annual average for people at work 1 to 34 hours during the reference week was 33.7 million, compared to the 32.9 million who usually work part time. Data on involuntary part-time workers also include workers who usually work full time but worked between 1-34 hours during the reference week of the survey. These differences mean the numbers of voluntary and involuntary part-time workers do not add to the total (which is reported here as people who usually work part time).

21 BLS Handbook of Methods, *supra* note 1. Other reasons for working part time involuntarily include slack work, seasonal work, and job started or ended during the week.

22 NWLC calculations based on BLS CPS Annual Table 23: Persons at work by occupation, sex, and usual full- or part-time status, <https://www.bls.gov/cps/cpsaat23.htm> (last visited Feb. 18, 2020). Figure is for 2019, and includes people at work part time during the reference week, rather than those who usually work part time.

23 See Shift Project, Working in the Service Sector in Boston (Jan. 2019), <https://shift.berkeley.edu/files/2019/01/Working-in-the-Service-Sector-in-Boston.pdf> (64 percent of those working fewer than 30 hours per week report a desire for more hours); Shift Project, Working in the Service Sector in Washington State (Dec. 2018), <https://shift.berkeley.edu/files/2018/12/Working-in-the-Service-Sector-in-Washington-State.pdf> (69 percent of those working fewer than 30 hours per week report a desire for more hours); Shift Project, Working in the Service Sector in Philadelphia (Feb. 2018), <https://shift.berkeley.edu/files/2018/01/Working-in-the-service-sector-in-Philadelphia.pdf> (74 percent of those working fewer than 30 hours per week report a desire for more hours); Shift Project, Working in the Service Sector in Connecticut (March 2018), <https://shift.berkeley.edu/files/2018/03/Working-in-the-service-sector-in-Connecticut.pdf> (64 percent of those working fewer than 30 hours per week report a desire for more hours); Shift Project, Working in the Service Sector in New Jersey (Jan. 2020), <https://shift.berkeley.edu/files/2020/01/Working-in-the-Service-Sector-in-New-Jersey.pdf> (63 percent of those working fewer than 35 hours per week report a desire for more hours). See also, e.g., Susan J. Lambert, Anna Haley-Lock & Julia R. Henly, *Schedule Flexibility in Hourly Jobs: Unanticipated Consequences and Promising Directions*, 15 *Community, Work & Family* 293, 301 (2012) (in study examining scheduling practices at a national women's apparel retailer, 46 percent of white, 57 percent of Black and 71 percent of Hispanic part-time sales associates—all of whom were women—wanted more hours).

24 Lonnie Golden & Jaeseung Kim, Ctr. for Law & Social Policy, Underemployment Just Isn't Working for U.S. Part-Time Workers, Center for Law and Social Policy (2020).

25 NWLC calculations based on BLS CPS Annual Table 23, *supra* note 22. Figure is for 2019, and includes those who worked part time during the reference week for noneconomic reasons but usually work full time, as well as those who worked part time during the reference week for noneconomic reasons and usually work part time. Workers are considered voluntarily part time if they work fewer than 35 hours for "noneconomic reasons" including school or training, health or medical limitations, child care problems, or other family or personal obligations. See BLS Handbook of Methods, *supra* note 1. Other reasons for working part time voluntarily include retirement or Social Security earnings limits, and all other reasons. Workers who usually work full time may be classified as voluntarily part-time during the reference week for all these reasons and additionally due to vacation or personal day, holiday, or weather-related curtailment (see BLS CPS Annual Table 20, *supra* note 20).

26 NWLC calculations based on BLS CPS Annual Table 23, *supra* note 22.

27 NWLC calculations based on BLS CPS Annual Table 20, *supra* note 20. Figure is for 2019, and includes those who worked part time during the reference week for noneconomic reasons but usually work full time, as well as those who worked part time during the reference week for noneconomic reasons and usually work part time.

28 Megan Dunn, *Who Chooses Part-Time Work and Why?*, BLS Monthly Labor Review (March 2018), <https://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/2018/article/who-chooses-part-time-work-and-why.htm>. Figures are for 2016.

29 NWLC calculations based on BLS CPS Annual Table 20, *supra* note 20. Figure is for 2019, and includes those who worked part time during the reference week for noneconomic reasons but usually work full time, as well as those who worked part time during the reference week for noneconomic reasons and usually work part time.

30 *Id.*

31 NWLC calculations based on BLS Modeled Wage Estimates, 2018, <https://www.bls.gov/mwe/> (last visited Feb. 18, 2020).

32 Lonnie Golden, Econ. Policy Inst., Part-Time Workers Pay a Big-Time Penalty: Hourly Pay-and-Benefits Penalties for Part-Time Work Are Largest for Those Seeking Full-Time Jobs and for Men, but Affect More Women (Feb. 2020), <https://www.epi.org/publication/part-time-pay-penalty/>.

33 BLS, Employee Benefits in the United States – March 2019, Table 9. Healthcare benefits: Access, participation, and take-up rates, [www.bls.gov/ncs/ebs/benefits/2019/ownership/civilian/table09a.pdf](http://www.bls.gov/ncs/ebs/benefits/2019/ownership/civilian/table09a.pdf). Figures are for civilian workers.

34 NWLC calculations based on BLS, Employee Benefits in the United States – March 2019, Table 2. Retirement benefits: Access, participation, and take-up rates, <https://www.bls.gov/ncs/ebs/benefits/2019/ownership/civilian/table02a.pdf>. Figures are for civilian workers.

35 NWLC calculations based on BLS, Employee Benefits in the United States – March 2019, Table 31. Leave benefits: Access, <https://www.bls.gov/ncs/ebs/benefits/2019/ownership/civilian/table31a.pdf>. Figures are for civilian workers.

36 John T. Addison, Orgul Demet Ozturk, & Si Wang, Univ. of South Carolina, *Job Promotion in Midcareer: Gender, Recession, and "Crowding,"* BLS Monthly Labor Review (Jan. 2014), <https://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/2014/article/job-promotion-in-midcareer.htm> (Table 3).

37 Lonnie Golden, Econ. Policy Inst., Irregular Work Scheduling and Its Consequences, at 22 (Apr. 2015), <https://www.epi.org/files/pdf/82524.pdf>. See also, e.g., Susan J. Lambert, *Passing the Buck: Labor Flexibility Practices that Transfer Risk onto Hourly Workers*, 61 *J. Human Relations* 1203, 1207 (2008); Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve, *Report on the Economic Well-Being of U.S. Households in 2017* (May 2018), <https://www.federalreserve.gov/publications/2018-economic-well-being-of-us-households-in-2017-employment.htm>.

38 Susan J. Lambert, Peter J. Fugiel & Julia R. Henly, Univ. of Chicago, Precarious Work Schedules Among Early-Career Employees in the US: A National Snapshot, at 6 (Aug. 2014), [https://ssa.uchicago.edu/sites/default/files/uploads/lambert.fugiel.henly\\_precarious\\_work\\_schedules.august2014\\_0.pdf](https://ssa.uchicago.edu/sites/default/files/uploads/lambert.fugiel.henly_precarious_work_schedules.august2014_0.pdf).

39 Daniel Schneider & Kristen Harknett, The Shift Project, It's About Time: How Work Schedule Instability Matters for Workers, Families, and Racial Inequality, at 4, 7 (Oct. 2019), <https://shift.berkeley.edu/files/2019/10/Its-About-Time-How-Work-Schedule-Instability-Matters-for-Workers-Families-and-Racial-Inequality.pdf>.

40 Liz Ben-Ishai, Rick McHugh & Claire McKenna, Ctr. for Law and Social Policy & Nat'l Employment Law Project, Out of Sync: How Unemployment Insurance Rules Fail Workers with Volatile Job Schedules, at 7 (Aug. 2015), <https://s27147.pcdn.co/wp-content/uploads/Out-of-Sync-Report.pdf>.