

*Working in a 24/7 Economy* Presser



**Working  
in a 24/7  
Economy**  
*Challenges  
for American  
Families*

Harriet B. Presser

Department of Sociology  
University of Maryland  
College Park, MD 20742

[presser@socy.umd.edu](mailto:presser@socy.umd.edu)

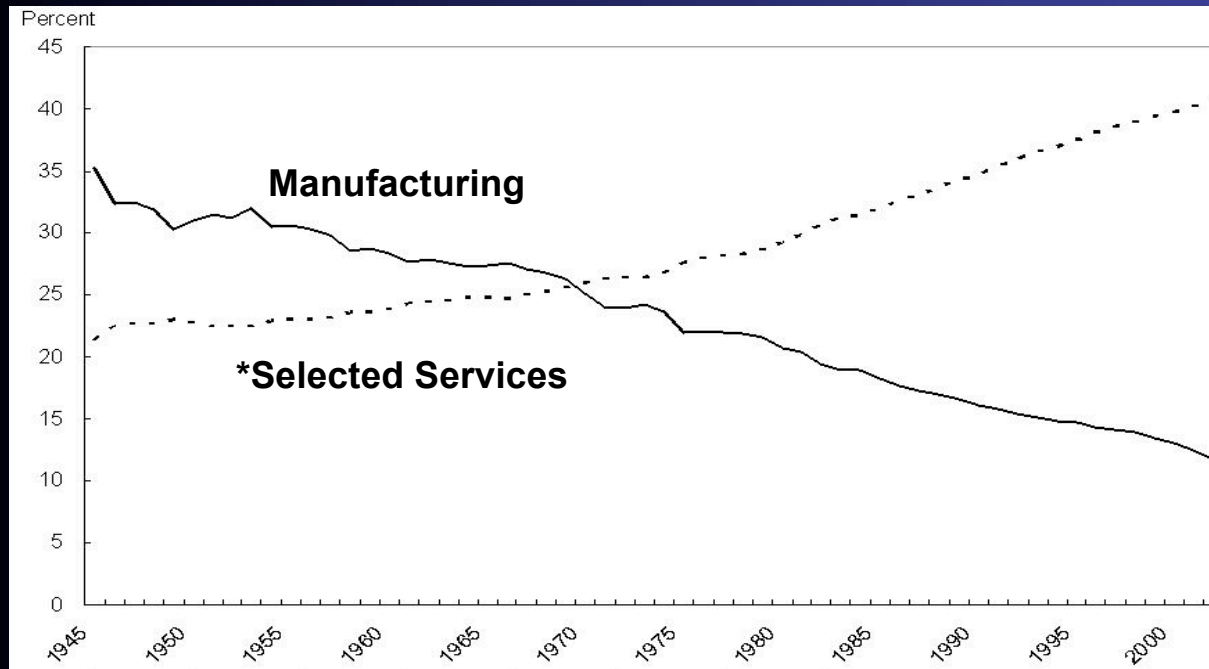
RUSSELL SAGE  
FOUNDATION

# Major Points

- The movement toward a 24/7 service economy has created a demand for millions of Americans, including parents with young children, to work evening, night, or rotating shifts, as well as weekends.
- The demand for late-hour employment has profound consequences for individual well-being, the nature and stability of family life, the way we care for children, and child well-being.
- Our failure to take into account the temporal complexity of work time and its consequences for family life compromises the effectiveness of work and family policies; we need more public discourse on this issue.

# Reasons for the 24/7 economy

## 1) Growth of service economy



NOTE: 'SELECTED SERVICES' include 'Information,' 'Professional and business services,' 'Education and health services,' 'Leisure and hospitality,' and 'Other services.'

NOT SHOWN: 'Natural resources and mining,' 'Construction,' 'Trade, transportation, and utilities,' 'Financial activities,' and 'Government.'

- Increased employment of women

## 2) Changing demography

- Aging population
- Postponement of marriage
- More dual-earner households

## 3) Changing technology

- Able to be 'on call' at all hours
- Reduced costs

# Prevalence of non-daytime and weekend employment

[May 1997 Current Population Survey]

- All employed Americans
  - 1 in 5 work most of their hours in the evenings or nights, or work a rotating schedule
  - 1 in 3 work Saturdays and/or Sundays
  - Considering both together, 2 in 5 work late shifts and/or weekends
- Dual earner couples with children under age 5
  - 1 in 3 have a spouse who works most hours in the evenings, nights, or has a rotating schedule
- All these ratios are **higher for low-income Americans**
- **Single mothers more** likely to work late shifts than married mothers

## Consequences for family life

- Poorer quality of marriages (evenings and nights)
- Greater marital instability (nights only)
- Greater participation of men in household chores
- Less parent-child interaction (e.g., fewer dinners as a family with evening shifts)
- Greater participation of fathers and grandmothers in child care
- Greater complexity of child care arrangements (e.g., reliance on more providers)

## Need for more public discourse

- Unmet need for evening and night care for children of low-income single mothers is substantial, yet difficult to find providers for late hour care. Many young children left unsupervised.
  - Need to expand the availability of evening and night care
  - Need to provide more child care subsidies to low-income mothers so they can afford to work during the daytime
- Desires of consumers (and business) versus health and social consequences for employees and their families.
  - We want 24/7 service
  - Growing demand creates new (low paying) jobs