

US service workers who rely on tips more susceptible to depression

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A recent study published by the *American Journal of Epidemiology* found that service workers in the United States who rely on tips are more susceptible to mental illness than un-tipped employees.

Workers in restaurants, salons, transportation services and other areas tend to be more reliant on tips because hourly wages in these occupations are often the lowest in all sectors. However, the uncertain nature of tips and irregular schedules contributes to higher rates of stress and depression among service workers.

The study found that, in particular, women in tipped service positions “had greater odds of reporting a depression diagnosis or symptoms relative to women in non-service work.”

The most common signs of mental illness include depression, sleeplessness and chronic stress, which are frequently found in individuals who work the most tiresome and demanding service jobs. Such work requires constant physical and mental activity, often exacerbated by the pressure imposed on workers by managers to meet profit demands.

According to Sarah Andrea, a Ph.D. candidate at the Oregon Health and Science University-Portland State University School of Public Health and the lead author of the study, “the higher prevalence of mental health problems may be linked to the precarious nature of service work, including lower and unpredictable wages, insufficient benefits, and a lack of control over work hours and assigned shifts.”

Ever-changing work schedules in service industry occupations (as well as in retail, warehouse, and many other part-time positions) have become commonplace within most American companies and undoubtedly cause immense distress among workers. These individuals must juggle personal and family obligations while being straddled with randomly assigned work

schedules.

The Economic Policy Institute released a study in 2015 which found that a staggering 17 percent of the labor force must work under precarious schedules.

A 2018 survey conducted by the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign of 1,717 Illinois workers found that 20 percent of hourly workers were regularly or often scheduled for on-call shifts, responsible for showing up to work when contacted or else be left without a shift, while over 40 percent said they had to do on-call work at least on occasion. Over a third of the workers get their schedule less than a week in advance, with over 10 percent of respondents stating they received less than one-days’ notice.

Moreover, tipped and contingent work occupations do not provide the necessary income needed to sustain a family or even one person. Irregular pay and schedules make it impossible for a worker to budget or plan for emergencies.

The consequences of this uncertainty on the mental and psychological health of workers are not hard to understand. According to *The Hill*, 63 percent of workers believe that the schedules forced on them result in negative health conditions. Two-thirds reported that their schedules interfered with their family and home lives.

A recent study published in the *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine* found that workers with irregular shifts and schedules for extended periods had decreased mental strength that interfered with basic daily functioning, such as the ability to reason, think and remember information.

It is striking that the rise in the number of Americans compelled to enter various contingent, low-paying jobs in the “gig” economy corresponds to the rise in mental illness and fatalities related to it from suicide,

Alzheimer's disease and drug and alcohol addiction. A report issued in June by the Centers for Disease Control Prevention (CDC) found that between 1999 and 2016, the suicide rate increased by 25 percent. Last year alone, 45,000 people died from suicide. Another CDC report found that more than 72,000 people died from drug overdoses in 2017, a 9.5 percent increase from the previous year.

The large share of workers entering into service occupations as part-time or contingent employees reflects the declining social conditions of workers since the 2008 financial crisis. The Obama administration, in the aftermath of the trillion-dollar bailout of Wall Street, led a frontal assault on the working class that resulted in one of the greatest transfers of wealth from the poor to the rich. Nearly 95 percent of the jobs created during the Obama administration were part-time, contract, on-call or temporary.

The false claims of an economic recovery and the belief that all is well in American society, touted by the Obama and Trump administrations alike, disguises the awful social reality that tens of millions of workers face under the criminal and callous capitalist system. The country's wealth, concentrated in the hands of a parasitic financial and corporate elite, must be seized by the working class and used to address these pressing psychological, mental and social afflictions.



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