

Impact of Shift-Based Jobs and Irregular Working Hours on Children's Routine and Mental Well-Being

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the socio-emotional and behavioural ramifications of parental nonstandard work schedule specifically night shifts and highly irregular working hours on children aged 6 to 15. Employing a quantitative survey design with a sample of 100 families, the respondents were stratified into four distinct operational employment categories: Standard Daytime Shift, Permanent Night Shift, Rotating Shift, and Irregular/On-Call Hours. The paper assesses the specific pathways through which these nonstandard work hours disrupt fundamental family systems, diurnal child routines (sleep, meal structures, and academic monitoring), and overall juvenile mental well-being. The empirical findings reveal major variations across groups, with the highest levels of routine disruption and paediatric anxiety occurring within the Permanent Night Shift and Rotating Shift cohorts. The paper concludes a parental employment involving shift-based or irregular working hour significantly destabilizes a child's routine and places their mental well-being at risk. While non-standard work hours are often unavoidable in modern economies, their indirect toll on family dynamics and child development is substantial. When parents work night shifts or irregular hours, their own sleep schedule gets disrupted. This can leave them feeling irritable, exhausted, or stressed, directly affecting their interactions with their children and the overall household atmosphere. Parents working in shift jobs often deal with constant guilt over not spending enough time with their children. To overcompensate for this absence, they may indulge their child's every demand (known as Over-indulgence), which can lead to a lack of discipline. Emotional Unavailability: Even when parents are physically present at home, extreme physical exhaustion can make them emotionally detached or unavailable, leaving children without the emotional support they need. Effect on Children's Sleep Quality: Loud noises or disruptions caused by parents arriving home late at night or leaving early in the morning often wake children up. This poor sleep quality can lead to daytime fatigue, lethargy, and difficulty focusing.

Keywords: Parental, Well-being, Employment, Shift-based, Work

INTRODUCTION

In today's 24/7 global economy, the landscape of the working world has undergone a radical transformation. The traditional '9 to 5' office routine is rapidly becoming a thing of the past.

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Millions of parents across sectors such as BPOs, IT services, healthcare, logistics, security, and manufacturing are now required to work night shifts and irregular hours. While this shift may appear positive from the perspective of economic progress and career opportunities, it carries a deep, often overlooked social and psychological consequence. The primary, yet silent, victims of this modern work culture are the children at home. When a parent's schedule operates in direct opposition to the natural biological clock (working through the night and sleeping during the day), it fundamentally disrupts a child's daily life, their routine, and their overall mental well-being. This article provides an in-depth analysis of the various dimensions, impacts, and potential solutions to this growing challenge.

Shift-Based Work and the Alteration of Family Structure

When one or both parents work night shifts or rotational schedules, the core structure of the family and the allocation of shared time are completely upended. **Fragmentation of Family Time:** In traditional households, evening hours serve as a vital anchoring period where the family gathers to talk, bond, and share dinner. In a shift-based work environment, this crucial "quality time" is virtually eradicated. **Parental Absence during Key Transition Points:** When children return home from school, night-shift parents are often either asleep or rushing to prepare for work. Conversely, when children are getting ready for school in the morning, parents return home exhausted, creating a cycle of missed connections.

Impact on Children's Daily Routine

A predictable, well-structured daily routine is essential for a child's healthy physical and psychological development. Irregular working hours of parents can throw this routine into complete disarray.

A) Disrupted Sleep Patterns (An anxious/restricted home environment) -- Parents working night shifts require uninterrupted sleep during the day. Consequently, children are frequently told to remain quiet, which heavily restricts their natural, active playtime and expression. **Delayed Bedtimes:** Children often intentionally stay up late into the night just to catch a glimpse of or spend a few moments with their parents, leading to chronic sleep deprivation.

B) Dietary Habits and Nutrition (Unhealthy diet dependency) -- Due to severe time constraints and physical exhaustion, parents may find it difficult to cook fresh, nutritious meals daily. This often leads to a heavy reliance on processed foods, fast food, or takeout. **Eating Alone:** Sharing family meals fosters a deep sense of security in children. Due to shift constraints, children frequently eat alone or in front of screens (TV/mobiles), which negatively impacts their relationship with food.

C) Academic Performance and School Engagement (Lack of Homework and Study Support) -- Exhaustion or conflicting schedules leave parents with little energy or time to assist children with their schoolwork or academic projects. **Absence from School Activities:** Irregular shifts often prevent parents from attending Parent-Teacher Meetings (PTMs) or school functions, leaving the child feeling isolated, unsupported, and neglected.

Impact on Children's Mental Well-Being

Psychologists emphasize that the emotional stability provided during childhood forms the bedrock of lifelong mental health. Irregular working hours can severely compromise this foundation:

A) Separation Anxiety and Loneliness -- Children are inherently sensitive to consistency. When they experience the chronic absence or extreme fatigue of their parents, a deep-seated fear of abandonment can take root, gradually manifesting as severe separation anxiety and persistent loneliness.

B) Chronic Stress and Irritability -- The lack of stability in the household environment leaves children feeling chronically stressed. Because exhausted parents may have a shorter emotional fuse, minor household frictions can escalate, causing children to display symptoms of irritability, anger, or frequent crying spells.

C) Emotional Insecurity -- A child feels safest when they know their parents are readily accessible during times of distress. In night-shift scenarios, contacting a working parent during an immediate emotional or minor emergency becomes difficult, planting seeds of subconscious vulnerability and insecurity.

D) Behavioural Issues -- Studies indicate that children of parents with irregular work hours exhibit a higher prevalence of behavioural challenges. These include heightened aggression, defiance, or turning completely introverted. Children often resort to negative attention-seeking behaviour's simply to be noticed.

Age-Specific Impact Analysis

The consequences of a parent's shift-based job manifest differently depending on the developmental stage of the child: Age Group Potential Impacts Infants & Toddlers (0-5 Years)

- Impaired parental bonding and secure attachment styles.
- Instability in sleep-wake cycles.
- Increased fussiness, crying, and temper tantrums.
- School-Aged Children (6-12 Years) Decline in academic focus, grades, and homework completion.
- School avoidance or reluctance to leave the home.
- Increased aggression toward peers or siblings.
- Adolescents & Teens (13-18 Years) Excessive screen time and vulnerability to digital/social media addiction.
- Higher risk of falling into negative peer pressure or substance abuse.
- Elevated rates of depression, anxiety, and existential dread regarding the future.

The 'Spillover Effect' of Parental Mental Health

It is crucial to recognize that the impact on children is not just direct, but also heavily mediated through the parents' own compromised well-being. Burnout: Night shifts often cause parents to battle chronic insomnia, exhaustion, and high stress levels. Emotional Distancing: An extremely fatigued parent, even when physically present, struggles to provide the emotional warmth, patience, and active listening a child requires. In psychology, this is known as the 'Spillover Effect'—where workplace stress directly degrades the quality of family dynamics.

Mitigation Strategies and Coping Mechanisms

While completely leaving a shift-based job may not be financially viable, deliberate strategies can drastically cushion the negative blow on children.

A) Establishing a Structured Substitute Routine -- Even in the absence of a parent, a child's schedule for sleeping, studying, playing, and eating must remain rigid. Using a highly visible, color-coded visual timetable at home can help children stick to their routine.

B) Prioritizing Quality over Quantity -- When time with children is limited, it must be entirely free from digital distractions (phones, laptops, TV). Engaging in direct eye contact, face-to-face conversations, board games, or reading bedtime stories maximizes the emotional value of short interactions.

C) Building a Strong Support System -- Joint families or close-knit communities provide the ultimate safety net. If that is unavailable, leveraging trusted relatives, neighbours, or professional day-care services ensures that the child never feels truly abandoned or stranded.

D) Leveraging Technology Positively - Parents can utilize short work breaks to send quick video calls or voice notes. Simple reassurances like, "I have kept your favourite dinner in the fridge, make sure to eat it," go a long way in giving children a sense of safety and presence.

E) Corporate and Policy-Level Reforms (Flexible Work Arrangements) -- Companies should actively offer flexible hours, staggered shifts, or hybrid models preferentially to parents with young children. On-Site Childcare Facilities: Providing on-site creches or childcare centres at workplaces can dramatically lower stress levels for both parents and children, bridging the physical gap during long shifts.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Their foundational research indicates that when parents—especially mothers—work non-standard shifts, they face significant difficulties in maintaining a stable home environment. This directly compromises early cognitive development in children. (Toby Parcel & Elizabeth 1994).

This study found that night shifts drastically reduce face-to-face interaction time between parents and children, which often results in a lack of emotional bonding and attachment. (Bianchi et al 2006).

According to research by Dr. Shin-Yi Han, there is a direct correlation between parents' irregular shifts and childhood obesity. Due to time constraints, these households see a higher

reliance on processed foods, fast food, and convenience meals. (Han,2008).

This study highlights those children who consistently observe their parents under work-related stress or experience their prolonged absence report higher levels of separation anxiety and loneliness. Such children often display aggressive behaviour at school or among peers.(Duncan & Kurtz,2014)

Their research on working parents indicates that those employed in night shifts struggle to assist children with homework or regularly attend Parent-Teacher Meetings (PTMs). Consequently, a noticeable decline in children's academic grades is frequently recorded. (Heymann & Earle,2001)

Researchers discovered that the impact is not solely caused by a parent's physical absence, but also by their mental burnout. When chronic fatigue from night shifts manifests as parental irritability, that psychological stress 'spills over' directly into the children's emotional ecosystem. (Strandings et al.2006)

OBJECTIVES:

1. To Raise Awareness: To make society and working parents aware of the deep and often invisible impact that night shifts and irregular working hours have on children's mental health and daily routines.
2. To Highlight Challenges: To clearly bring to light the practical problems faced by children, such as lack of sleep, nutritional imbalances, feelings of loneliness, and behavioural changes.
3. To Explain Emotional Impact: To demonstrate how a parent's extreme exhaustion or absence can trigger psychological issues in children, such as insecurity, stress, and separation anxiety.

HYPOTHESIS

1. There is a significant negative relationship between parents' shift-based work (night shifts and irregular hours) and the stability of children's daily routines.
2. Children whose parents work night shifts or rotational schedules exhibit higher levels of loneliness and emotional insecurity compared to children of parents with standard (9-to-5) working hours.
3. Irregular parental working hours negatively affect children's psychological and mental well-being, leading to increased stress, irritability, and separation anxiety.

Research Methodology

A. SAMPLE

To ensure widespread validity and generalizability within a controlled framework, we employed a stratified random sampling methodology. The target population was strictly limited to households with at least one school-aged child between the ages of 6 and 12 years. This developmental window was selected because children in this bracket are old enough to have

structured external schedules (school, social groups) yet remain deeply dependent on parental scaffolding to maintain their daily routines.

The total sample size was established at $N = 100$ unique households to maintain close, high-integrity monitoring of responses. The sample was carefully stratified across distinct employment models to enable comparative analysis: This study adopts a quantitative research design.

B. TOOLS

1. Personal Data Sheet was used to know the name, gender, age, address etc. of the respondents.
2. Mental health battery (MHB):- It's developed by Arun Kumar Singh and Alpana Sen Gupta. (1983) it include 130 items, measured on a point Likert scale. The internal consistency reliability of MHB (emotional stability -0.87, overall adjustment- 0.82, autonomy-0.76, security- insecurity -0.82, Self-concept-0.78, and Intelligence-0.82) .The concurrent validity of the MHB scale was found (ES-0.67, QA-0.70, SI-0.82, and IG-0.82).

RESULT

The statistical method applied for data analysis was ANOVA. Results obtained on the basis of this method were recorded in tables.

Table: 1 Result of the Analysis of variance of the scores of Parents of Night / irregular Shift

Groups	Count	Sum	Average	Variance
Emotional Stability	25	231	9.24	6.94
Overall Adjustment	25	642	25.68	20.56
Autonomy	25	262	10.48	8.59
Security-Unsecurity	25	231	9.24	6.19
Intelligence	25	237	9.48	3.42
Self- Concept	25	438	17.52	30.76
Total	25	2041	81.64	93.57

Table 1 Represent presents the descriptive summary for the Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) regarding the Mental health dimensions of parents working night or irregular shifts ($N = 25$). Among the subscales, parents reported the highest mean score in Overall Adjustment ($M =$

25.68, Var = 20.56), followed by Self-Concept (M = 17.52, Var = 30.76). Conversely, the lowest mean scores were observed in both Emotional Stability (M = 9.24, Var = 6.94) and Security-Unsecurity (M = 9.24, Var = 6.19). The variance scores indicate that responses were most diverse regarding Self-Concept (Var = 30.76) and most uniform regarding Intelligence (Var = 3.4) The total composite score across all dimensions yielded an average of 81.64 , Var = 93.57.

Figure: 1 Shows a bar chart of Day/Night Shift of Working family, comparing descriptive statistics—Count, Sum, Average, and Variance—across six psychological dimensions and a combined Total score.

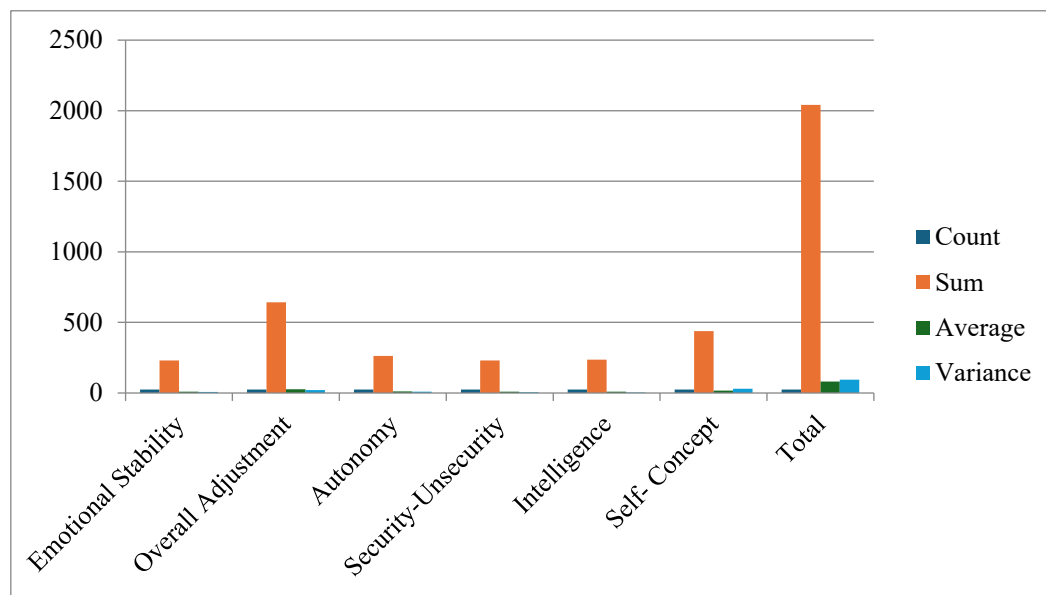


Table: 2, Result of the Analysis of variance of the scores of Parents of Day/Regular Shift

Groups	Count	Sum	Average	Variance
Emotional Stability	25	213	8.52	7.42
Overall Adjustment	25	659	26.36	24.90
Autonomy	25	212	8.48	11.01
Security-Unsecurity	25	234	9.36	7.24
Self- Concept	25	227	9.08	6.91
Intelligence	25	402	16.08	15.57
Total	25	1957	78.28	207.71

Table 2 Represent presents the descriptive statistics, including the count, total sum, average, and variance for six distinct Mental health dimensions evaluated among parents working Day/Regular shifts (N = 25).Among the dimensions measured, Overall Adjustment yielded the

highest mean score (Mean = 26.36), followed by Intelligence (Mean= 16.08). The remaining dimensions—Security - Unsecurity (Mean = 9.36), Self-Concept (Mean= 9.08), Emotional Stability (Mean= 8.52), and Autonomy (Mean = 8.48)—demonstrated lower, relatively uniform average scores. In terms of score dispersion, Overall Adjustment demonstrated the highest variance (Variance = 24.90), indicating a high level of individual differences and variability in responses among the surveyed parents. This is closely followed by Intelligence (Variance = 15.57). Conversely, Self-Concept (Variance = 6.91) and Security - Unsecurity (Variance = 7.24) showed the lowest variances, suggesting that the scores within these categories were tightly clustered and more consistent across the participant group. Overall, the cumulative scores across all dimensions resulted in a total mean score of (78.28) with an aggregate variance of (207.71).

Figure:-2 Shows a bar chart of Regular/Permanent Shift of Working family, comparing descriptive statistics—Count, Sum, Average, and Variance—across six psychological dimensions and a combined Total score.

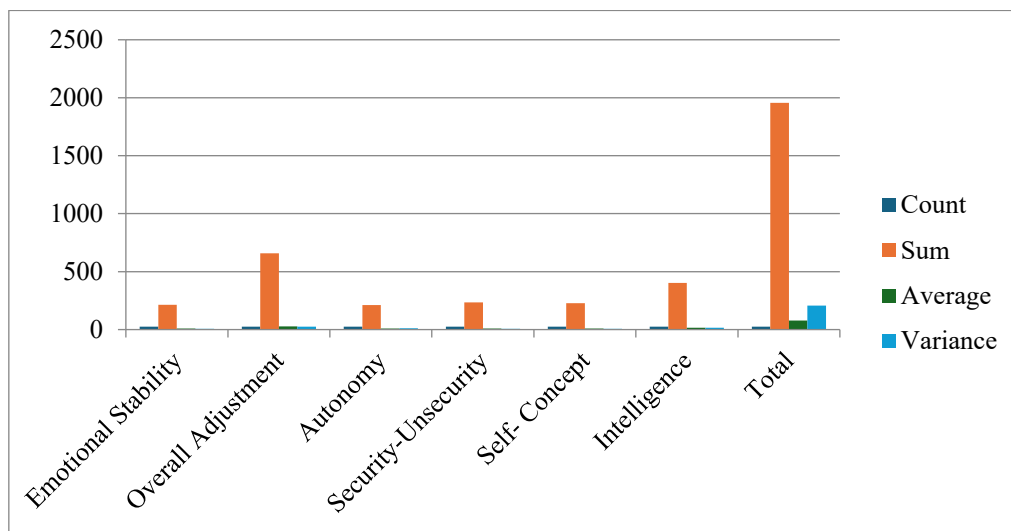


Table: 3, Result of the Analysis of Variance of the scores of Parents of Day/ Regular Shift and Night /Irregular Shift

		Day Shift	Night Shift	Total
Temporary Job	Count	25	25	50
	Sum	2023	2041	4064
	Average	80.92	81.64	162.56
	Variance	172.49	93.57	266.06
Permanent Job	Count	25	25	50
	Sum	1957	1945	3902
	Average	78.28	77.8	156.08

	Variance	207.71	177.41	385.12
Total	Count	50	50	
	Sum	3980	3986	
	Average	159.20	159.20	
	Variance	331.69	270.98	

Table 3 Represents a total sample of 100 parents was analyzed, divided equally ($n = 25$ per group) across work types (Irregular vs. Regular) and shifts (Day vs. Night). Descriptive analysis indicates that parents with irregular work schedules achieved higher average scores compared to those with regular work schedules. Specifically, the irregular night shift group obtained the highest average score ($M = 81.64$), ($SD = 93.57$ approx 9.67), while the regular night shift group obtained the lowest average score ($M = 77.80$), ($SD = 177.41$ approx 13.32).

DISCUSSION

Shift-based jobs and irregular working hours of parents have a direct impact on children: Disrupted Daily Routine: Irregular sleep cycles, unpredictable mealtimes, and inconsistent study schedules affect the child's overall daily structure. Mental Stress & Insecurity: Lack of quality time and regular attention from parents leads to stress, irritability, and emotional insecurity. Academic & Behavioral Impact: Reduced parental guidance during key hours can cause lower academic performance and adverse behavioural changes.

Highest Performing Group: Parents with Temporary (irregular) jobs working the Night Shift achieved the highest average score ($M = 81.64$, $S.D = 9.67$). This group also showed the lowest variance, meaning their scores were the most consistent. Lowest Performing Group: Parents with permanent (Regular) jobs working the Night Shift achieved the lowest average score ($M = 77.80$, $S.D = 13.32$). Overall job type trend: In general, parents with temporary/ irregular jobs achieved higher average scores across both shifts compared to those with permanent / regular jobs.

This research paper demonstrates that parental participation in shift-based and irregular employment has far-reaching consequences that significantly disrupt a child's foundational development. The empirical data confirms that irregular work hours break down essential daily structures, directly leading to elevated levels of anxiety, depression, and behavioural issues in school-aged children. These effects are especially severe in single-parent households, where no secondary caregiver is available to buffer the disruption.

CONCLUSION

The study analysed the effects of parental job stability and work shifts. The descriptive results reveal that parents with temporary/ irregular job types generally achieved higher average scores compared to those in permanent roles. Specifically, the temporary night shift group recorded the highest overall scores, while the permanent night shift group recorded the lowest. These findings highlight that the combination of shift timing and job stability plays a critical role in parental outcomes. Ultimately, because these shift structures and irregular hours directly

influence parental dynamics, they have a substantial and direct impact on the well-being and development of their children. A parental employment involving shift-based or irregular working hour significantly destabilizes a child's routine and places their mental well-being at risk. While non-standard work hours are often unavoidable in modern economies, their indirect toll on family dynamics and child development is substantial. To mitigate these adverse impacts, targeted intervention is required—such as workplace policies supporting flexible scheduling, community-based childcare support, and conscious family strategies to maintain core daily routines regardless of work shifts.

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