health care occupations that vary by class and gender: doctors, nurses, EMTs, and nursing assistants. The research design creates sociology’s classic two-by-two table, gender by class (see table 2.1).

Note that the working-class male occupation (EMT) earns almost as much as the female-dominated profession (nursing) and significantly more than the female-dominated working-class occupation (nursing assistant). The data for the occupations in our study closely approximate the national data, except for the EMT incomes. According to national data, EMTs earn a median income of $33,000—significantly below the median income of the EMTs who answered our survey. Later we discuss the reasons for this income difference in more detail, but here we note that the most important reason for it is the high proportion (62 percent) of our EMTs who worked second jobs—higher than in any other group in our study.

Also fundamental to our research design was that we studied these four occupations at eight organizational sites, described in greater detail later in the chapter.

DATA: MULTIPLE METHODS

We collected five types of data in two counties in the Northeastern United States whose demographics approximated those of the national population. First, at the end of 2004 we mailed a survey to a random sample of two hundred people in each occupation. As mentioned earlier, the state registration requirement gave us a crucial methodological advantage by making it possible to draw a random sample. To obtain the survey sam-
The key outcome (or dependent variable) is what we call the person-shift, by which we mean one person working one eight-hour shift. The simplest case is a single person working a single shift as scheduled; that would generate one person-shift entry. If someone “works a double”—that is, works two shifts in a row, or sixteen hours straight—that would be two person-shifts. If someone calls in sick, that generates a cross-out entry.
Unpredictability and Churning

Working their regular schedules. Another substantial block of person-shifts were worked by per diem workers, who covered slightly more than one out of every twenty person-shifts; a much smaller number of person-shifts, about one out of two hundred, were covered by temp agency nurses. About one out of nine shifts were cross-outs, which included vacations and holidays as well as call-outs for being sick. (Later in this chapter we break down some of the specific categories within cross-outs.) A little more than one in eight shifts were pickups.

Unpredictability: Pervasive or Concentrated?

An alternative way of understanding churning is to determine whether cross-out and pickup shifts are concentrated among a limited subset of workers, or whether a substantial proportion of workers are significant participants in this process. For example, the literature suggests that less than 3 percent of the population is responsible for 75 percent of violent crime. If 3 percent of the workforce are responsible for 75 percent of the churning, that changes how we think about the issue: It would mean unpredictability is not pervasive or diffuse but instead is concentrated.

Figure 5.2  Person-Shifts Worked According to the Fixed Schedule

Source: Authors’ calculations based on Berkman daily schedules.
How many of the people we observed did not participate at all in this churning? How many people showed up, worked their job, never took a day off, and never picked up a day? The answer is: zero. Not one employee did that over the course of six months. Churning is a significant part of the experience of just about every worker.

Just about everyone “crossed out” now and then, missing days they had been scheduled to work, and almost no one did a lot of it; about four out of five workers crossed out an average of one to four times a month—that is, somewhere between once a week and once a month (see figure 5.3). Remember, however, that cross-outs include vacation days as well as sick days, a point discussed later in this chapter and explored in more detail in chapter 7. There was much more of a spread when it came to picking up extra shifts. A little over one-quarter of the employees we observed did so less than once a month, and a little over one-quarter did so more than four times a month—that is, on average they picked up at least one extra shift a week. And if we combine pickups and cross-outs, and ask how many people had less than once a month when they varied from the set schedule, the answer is less than 3 percent of the workforce (2.7 percent);