

## Gig economy: Moonlighting at record high despite risks to mental, physical, emotional, social health

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At 6:30 a.m., Mary Dotsey starts work prepping and serving lunch to Sebastian River Middle School students. At 1:30 p.m., she heads home to get ready for her next job, 30 minutes away in Vero Beach. At 4 p.m., she starts waiting tables at Ocean Grill three nights a week. She finally gets back home about 10 or later.

Now the 58-year-old Vero Lakes Estates resident said she's considering a third job driving for Uber or Lyft on her only two weeknights off.

"I'm tired," she said countless times. "I'm just buried. I make money, but I'm doggie-paddling. Groceries, homeowners insurance and car insurance is just so out of control."

Bills are just the tip of the iceberg. A litany of unexpected expenses included a new used car, a home equity loan to replace her failed septic system, and financial assistance for her two daughters. The 19-year-old attends Indian River State College and the 21-year-old in Georgia has medical bills.

"It doesn't end," Dotsey said. "I literally just can't even take a few days off."

### Moonlighting hits record number

Many people like Dotsey are working long hours at multiple jobs these days — even at the expense of their mental, physical, emotional and social well-being. From coping with the high cost of living to supporting family members to becoming independent from their parents, they feel like they have no choice.

More people worked multiple jobs in December than at any other time since 1994, a 13.5% increase to 8.6 million from 7.4 million, according to Federal Reserve research based on U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics data.

High inflation, remote work, fear of layoffs and the labor market's seasonality were significant contributors to people taking multiple jobs post-pandemic, according to economists.

Inflation rose to a 40-year high of 8.5% during the peak of the coronavirus pandemic in March 2022, pushing people into multiple jobs even as the labor market was tight, according to experts.

Florida rents increased 30-47% from 2021 to 2022, according to a 2022 rental market study by the University of Florida's Shimberg Center for Housing Studies. But while rental rates rose by double digits in some parts of Palm Beach County during the early years of the pandemic, many areas have seen them stabilize or even fall in recent months.

In West Palm Beach, Apartmentlist.com said the overall median rent for a two-bedroom apartment this month is \$1,713, which is a 2.9% drop from the same time last year.

In Boca Raton, the median rent for a two-bedroom apartment is \$2,386, which is essentially the same as June 2023, according to Apartmentlist.

In the Miami metro area, which includes Palm Beach, Broward and Miami-Dade counties, March's rent was up 2.76% from the previous year.

And a Florida Atlantic University study released in May found that national rents increased by 3.5% on an annual basis through March, but that Florida saw "tepid" rent growth.

"For the most part, the measured metros in Florida are getting back in shape in terms of annual rental increases and slowly returning to their historic pricing trends," said FAU housing economist Ken H. Johnson in a statement. "Rent growth is significantly below the national average, suggesting that Florida may no longer be the epicenter of the nation's rent crisis."

In the Treasure Coast, rents averaged \$2,378 in 2023 and increased between 3% and 17% from 2022 to 2023, according to a SmartAsset study. Over 34% of renters were "cost-burdened," as they spent over 40% of their income on housing, according to a 2024 Shimberg Center study.

Mithoson Valliere was one of those 21,674 cost-burdened renters last year. The 27-year-old Port St. Lucie resident was working a full-time lawn care job when he added a part-time food delivery driver job to his day.

"Even with the DoorDash work, I was barely paying the bills," he said.

Losing his job and then his roommate forced him back into his mother's house. But he hoped the new job he started in March as an HVAC technician would change his life for the better.

If he performs well and passes his three-month training period, he could make \$60,000 to \$100,000 annually — and eventually quit DoorDash. But not yet, he said, even though it was adding stress to his life.

“I need to start saving money so I can move into my place,” he said.

## **Working a second job can impair health**

Moonlighting can increase the risk of stress, insomnia, fatigue, exhaustion, anxiety, depression, social dysfunction, work-related accidents, and diseases such as stroke, obesity, diabetes, heart disease, acute infection, high blood pressure, according to the Surgeon General, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and many peer-viewed health studies.

Working long hours hampers the rest and recovery time needed for healthy body functioning, said Chris Cunningham, a psychology professor and director of the Healthy and Optimal Work Lab at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga.

“Most people can balance job demands ... for seven to 10 hours, after which they get depleted,” he said.

Stress and lack of rest make it difficult for the body to turn off its fight or flight response, according to Chelsea LeNoble, a University of Central Florida psychology professor. This can lower higher-order cognitive functions such as reasoning, problem-solving, and decision-making.

People can replenish their energy by getting adequate sleep, detaching from work, having social connections, and developing interests and hobbies unrelated to work, said Cunningham.

Louis Raphael Conde learned that the hard way. The 22-year-old literally and figurately got tired of working two part-time jobs after his family immigrated from Haiti to Port St. Lucie in 2022.

As a prep cook for a catering company and a Creole interpreter for medical patients, he had to ride his bike or take a Tri-Rail train to get around West Palm Beach, where he lived at the time. He made between \$300 and \$800 a month to supplement his family's income, including that of his father still in Haiti.

“My younger brother and I are just trying to help around as much as we can ourselves and figure out what we want to do in our lives,” Conde said.

In March, he was living with his mother in Port St. Lucie and working only one full-time job at Publix. Having found more peace and financial independence, he had no plans to move out or work over 40 hours a week again.

“I would have no personal life if I did that,” he said.

## **Multiple jobs can diminish quality of life**

For Dotsey, a personal life of traveling, going to the beach, getting her nails done and buying steaks for dinner are distant memories. She longs to go to Universal Studios and Bok Tower Gardens in Lake Wales, Florida, again.

“We haven’t done that in so long. I don’t leave my house because I don’t want to spend any money,” she said. “I don’t have a life.

“I do stress out,” she said, but she said she tries to live by the motto: “I’ll figure it out.”

So for now, she’ll be working the summer school lunch shift and living on cereal, chicken, Ramen noodles and a pizza special of two slices for \$10. “I don’t even get a drink anymore,” she said.

Instead of dwelling on the negative emotions from her financial situation and lack of work-life balance, she said she tries to focus on being grateful for her family, her home and her health.

“All I can do is breathe and sit underneath my oak tree,” she said. “I would just love to be able to not wonder when the next shoe’s going to drop. I would just love to be able to not think of bills.”

*Palm Beach Post reporter Kimberly Miller contributed to this report.*

