



UCL

Data After Dark: Didobi Night Worker Report

dataafterdark.org

Data After Dark: Didobi Night Worker Report

An independent research report to establish a better data and evidence base for night workers in London

Authors

Matthew Hopkinson
Matt Baker

Didobi Limited



December 2025

This report is part of the *Data After Dark* transdisciplinary research collaboration. The summary report, *Data After Dark: New Evidence on Night Work in London*, and additional research can be accessed [here](#).

Data After Dark was supported by the Mayor of London. This project has received support, advice, and funding from UCL Innovation & Enterprise.

COVER PHOTO: [Abdalla Qudsi](#)

Table of Contents

1. Foreword	4
2. Introduction	5
3. Executive Summary	6
4. Profile of night workers in London	9
5. Methodology	11
6. Survey findings	12
<i>a. Businesses</i>	12
<i>b. Night workers</i>	14
7. Focus group and interviews	29
8. Case study 1: Cleaners	30
9. Case study 2: On-demand food delivery drivers	32
10. Conclusion	36
Appendix A. Survey questions – Businesses employing night workers	39
Appendix B. Survey questions – Night workers	41

1. Foreword

This research, in partnership with University College London (UCL) and the Greater London Authority (GLA), seeks to establish a broader understanding of urban communities, culture, environment and opportunities after dark. It includes quantitative and qualitative methods to capture insights into a diverse range of night workers to help develop better policies to support a more inclusive night-time economy.

The night-time economy is the fifth biggest industry in the whole of the UK and plays a huge role in ensuring that London is one of the most visited cities in the world. The capital's 1.32-million-night workers not only help keep the city running while most of us sleep but also contribute over £26 billion to the economy every year and support one in eight of London's jobs. But even though this sector is increasingly recognised as essential to making places vibrant and liveable, we still know far too little about its workers. Data is patchy and much of what is available focusses on the physical and physiological impact of night shifts on workers' health.

Our research seeks to start filling those gaps and find out what challenges night workers face across the capital. How do they get to and from work when their shifts take place during anti-social hours? What are their conditions like? And do they feel safe working at night?

These are just some of the questions we asked workers across London to get a more detailed picture of their working environment and challenges faced getting to and from work. From emergency services and hospitality workers to cleaners and food delivery drivers, we heard a wide range of experiences.

This variation can, in some ways, be divided between public sector unionised jobs and private sector non-unionised jobs. Those in unionised public sector roles, for example, largely enjoyed stable hours and better pay, status and conditions than those working in private sector roles such as hospitality, logistics and cleaning.

This research comes at a time when a raft of employment reforms is currently going through parliament. The new government has made a 'New Deal for Working People' a centrepiece policy to end exploitative practices and make work more secure. That legislation is starting to grapple with these issues will be welcomed by those working to keep London running throughout the night and ensure its night-time economy is enjoyed by all.

But as we saw only too clearly, many workers still operate in the shadows without unions, workplace representation or any advocacy to help them. Their stories and experiences in the workplace continue to be unseen and remain unknown. And if policy changes are to properly grip these challenges to give all night workers the dignity and security they deserve, more research of this nature needs to be carried out to ensure their voices are properly heard.

2. Introduction

The concept of a 24-hour city has its origins in the development of urban policy in the late 1980s with planning policy guidance emerging across the UK in the early '90s. This mirrored global trends and in the 1995 edition of *Emerging Trends in Real Estate*,¹ its authors predicted that: "For the future, we believe the premier investment opportunities will be available in the nation's '24-hour cities.' These markets, urban or suburban, are places where people can comfortably and securely live, work, and shop. In contrast, '9-to-5' markets — those with weak residential fundamentals — have poor investment prospects."

Those cities that evolved their 24-hour offer would go on to achieve superior economic performance and there is now a wealth of research showing that thriving night-time economies contribute greatly to a city's economic growth.²

However, while this enhances property and real estate values, and helps meet the needs of a dynamic and diverse consumer base, it can also create wider inequalities in pay and conditions than those experienced by daytime workers. Latest data (March 2024) by GLA Economics³ acknowledges that workers in night-time industries (other than 24-hour health and personal services) are more likely on average to be paid below the London Living Wage⁴ than those in other industries.

As these inequalities widen and we continue to read stories of bus drivers, cleaners and other key workers⁵ being bussed into London because they cannot afford to live in the capital, there is a real danger of a considerable swathe of the workforce being left behind.

For the purposes of this report, we have defined night workers as those working between the hours of 6pm to 6am. The insights we have gained from our research are set out as follows. The first section of the report establishes a profile of night workers in London and reveals the findings of our quantitative research survey, while the second section outlines qualitative findings from interviews and focus groups with vulnerable workers.

¹ 24-Hour Cities, Hugh F Kelly (Routledge) 2016

² 24-Hour Cities, Hugh F Kelly (Routledge) 2016

³ London at Night: An Updated Evidence Base for a 24 Hour City – see [here](#).

⁴ London After Dark: The reality of Working at Night in the Capital (Living Wage Foundation) November 2024 <https://www.livingwage.org.uk/london-after-dark-reality-working-night-capital>

⁵ <https://www.standard.co.uk/homesandproperty/renting/key-workers-driven-out-of-our-city-by-rocketing-london-rents-b1140317.html#>

3. Executive Summary

“We are the invisibles.”

During many hours of engagement with low paid workers, these three words chillingly summarised the most challenging aspects of London’s night work.

Uttered by a cleaner who started work at 4am, as part of a focus group discussion, they reflected a wider trend of cleaners feeling unseen, powerless and unheard. “No one sees us, and no one cares about us,” she told us. This lack of recognition frequently manifested itself in poor treatment. We heard stories of cleaners being denied maternity pay, being refused toilet breaks and having excessive workloads.

Work insecurity was to become a theme that dominated discussions with night workers (particularly those in hospitality and cleaning), complaining about uncertain hours that merely sustained a breadline existence.

People frequently told us they were working less than 16 hours a week, despite wanting to work more, and living anxiously in the hope of getting more shifts. Many also experienced shift cancellations at short notice. Those working shorter shifts also felt they were being pushed to do the work of two people or that of a longer shift. Waiters spoke of restaurants becoming increasingly understaffed and having to manage more covers (customers). While cleaners spoke of having to clean up to eight floors in four hours.

“It’s really hard to do this,” one explained. “You can’t even stop for a toilet break. It should be a longer shift but they (employers) are trying to pay as little as possible to get the job done.”

Existing data shows some of these sectors have lost a large share of night workers in recent years (hospitality in London, for example, has lost nearly half its night-time workforce since 2017 when 151,000 worked at night) and this contraction is putting more pressure on remaining workers.

When it came to evaluate our research findings, it became clear that there is a complex hierarchy of night workers which varies enormously in terms of conditions, pay and recognition. On the one hand, rail workers have recently been awarded a 14 per cent pay rise, for example, but many operating in more precarious roles in food delivery, cleaning and hospitality do not feel they have the same visibility, voice or recognition.

Similarly, those working for banks and financial services across the globe at night will not have comparable experiences to those riding/driving the streets delivering food through on-demand platforms.

So, from the outset, it’s clear that the definition of night workers is broad and covers a huge range of occupations, which are linked only by their working hours. This research seeks to cast a wider quantitative net to gain insights on night workers in multiple occupations. But we also include a qualitative focus on more vulnerable workers to understand the challenges facing those in insecure work in London.

Work Foundation analysis⁶ estimates that one in five UK workers (6.8 million) are in severely insecure work and to develop better policy to support this sector we need a clearer understanding of the nature of their work.

As our research shows, some of it is characterised by threats to their safety. In discussions with on-demand platform drivers, for example, we heard how night shifts posed all manner of dangerous obstacles to navigate.

In scenes that could be taken out of a modern crime drama, drivers told us how they would enter modern London housing estates only to find themselves quickly cornered by gangs on mopeds without licence plates who were circling the area looking for someone to steal from.

Some of these drivers were able to quickly get in touch with their employers to explain the situation. They were subsequently cleared to abort their delivery and get out of the area as quickly as possible. Others, however, were not so lucky. They frequently had their bikes and food stolen and would have to take a bus or walk miles to get home. They would also be unable to earn any money until they replaced their stolen e-bike, which would typically cost over £1,200.

Safety, though, was not the only threat they faced. At a time when we have seen sharp increases in the cost of living, low paid workers are being hit harder than most. As one of the most expensive European cities to live in, London is very much at the sharp end of this crisis, and the fact that almost a third of our survey respondents were not receiving the London Living Wage is a cause for concern. Workers spoke of the difficulties they faced in paying rent and how they would have to travel to work by bus, as they could not afford the Tube. This frequently made it much harder to get to and from work and would often take twice as long.

It was clear from conversations in focus groups that a combination of low pay and limited hours is forcing people into poverty. But in too many instances, it wasn't just a wage that meets actual living costs that workers were being denied. There were also multiple cases where they were being stripped of their dignity in the process.

These included delivery drivers that were forced to urinate in a bottle in their car because they had to make over 70 deliveries a night and could not afford to stop to take a toilet break. On-demand platform workers who had to stand outside in snow and pouring rain while food was being prepared because there were no facilities for them to wait in. And cleaners who were forced by recruitment agencies to take shifts at short notice or be taken off the books and denied future opportunities. This often resulted in cleaners not being able to get childcare and being forced to leave young children at home on their own. In focus groups, single mothers broke down in tears as they recounted how they had to leave young children with learning difficulties at home on their own to take shifts at short notice because they would lose future shifts otherwise.

These examples of workers having their self-respect and sense of worth constantly undermined points to a wider problem of workplace abuses. With record numbers of

⁶ <https://www.lancaster.ac.uk/work-foundation/publications/the-uk-insecure-work-index-2024>

people currently out of work because of poor mental health, and research from Gallup showing that burnout and toxic management have ensured UK employees are the least motivated in Europe,⁷ this should be a priority for policymakers. Night workers are often at the sharp end of these abuses, and any legislative changes to improve workforce conditions needs to make sure this group is at the forefront of urgently needed new thinking.

⁷ <https://www.thetimes.com/business-money/companies/article/why-uk-workers-quit-gdp-economy-x2mmszkv6>

4. Profile of Night Workers in London

According to data published by GLA Economics, London had 1.32-million-night workers in 2023, making up 25% of the city's workforce. However, in 2017 this number was considerably higher, representing 30% of the city's workforce. London's night-time economy has since taken a hit and lost considerable jobs as illustrated in figure 1.



Source: GLA Economics analysis of ONS Labour Force Survey 2015-2022

CITY INTELLIGENCE

Figure 1. Evening and night-time workers in London (No of workers LHS and share of total % RHS)

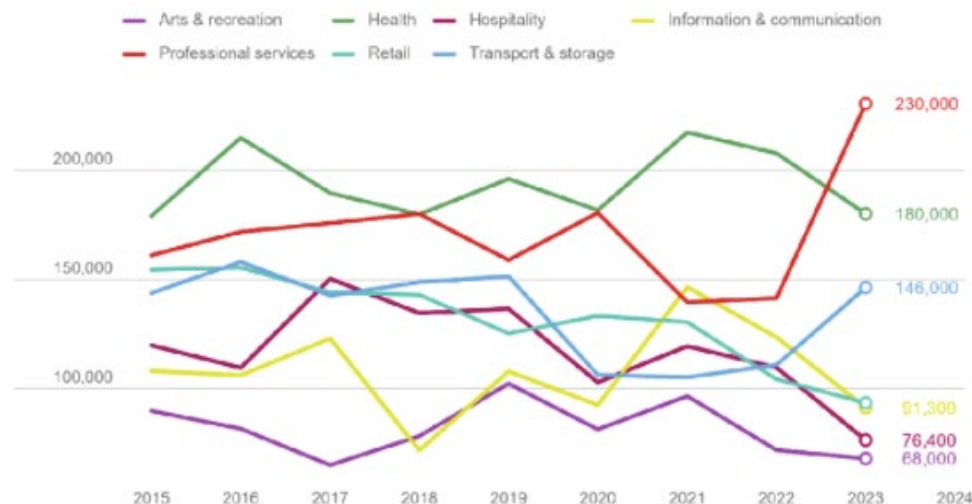
Hospitality is one of the sectors to have been damaged the worst. Britain saw a loss of 4,600 venues in the 12 months up to May 2023.⁸ Recruiting night workers, particularly those in hospitality, has proven to be difficult post-Brexit and there are still skill shortages across a number of professions be they day or night workers, with unemployment rates at a historic low of 4.3% at the end of 2024 according to the ONS Labour market survey.⁹

However, as the chart below shows, other sectors such as professional services and transport are growing. There has also been a growth in other areas like on-demand

⁸ <https://www.thedrinksbusiness.com/2023/05/hospitality-sector-4600-venue-closures-in-12-months/>

⁹ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/bulletins/uklabourmarket/deceember2024>

food delivery services such as Deliveroo, UberEATS and Just Eat. As a measure of how fast this sector is growing, Deliveroo said it doubled its UK couriers from 25,000 in 2020 to more than 50,000 in 2021. This sector has continued to grow since the pandemic, providing more opportunities for night work in London.



Source: Labour Force Survey 2015-2023, UK Data Service.

Figure 2. Labour Force Survey by sector 2015-23

Night workers are individuals and there is no typical night worker profile in London. However, as research by the Work Foundation shows,¹⁰ there has been a growth of people in insecure work in the last year. In 2022 business management consultants Baringa¹¹ produced research showing Londoners are suffering the greatest increases in risk of financial vulnerability, and night work is likely to be at the sharp end of the rise in insecure work.

Surveys such as this as well as anecdotal press reports reveal that there are increasing numbers of workers without access to staff rooms, toilets and services that are provided for daytime workers such as healthcare, childcare and places to relax, store belongings and access healthy food. Understanding the barriers to accessing these workplace rights and the impacts on workers that a deteriorating economic environment is causing is at the heart of this research and key to developing a clearer picture of their profile and numbers.

¹⁰ <https://www.lancaster.ac.uk/work-foundation/publications/the-uk-insecure-work-index-2024#:~:text=In%202023%2C%20an%20estimated%206.8,has%20risen%20by%20600%2C000%20people>

¹¹ <https://www.baringa.com/en/insights/financial-vulnerability/britains-vulnerable-working-population/>

5. Methodology

Our research was carried out over a five-month period and was led by two online surveys (see appendices) hosted on the Commonplace survey platform, which sought to capture the views of night workers and businesses on issues ranging from transport and pay to safety and workplace conditions. This was promoted through UCL and the GLA along with a wide range of networks. These included Business Improvement Districts (BIDs), trade unions, trade bodies and organisations like Citizens UK among others. We captured 584 responses from night workers and a further 64 responses from businesses from the surveys. These responses were further supplemented with interviews with a range of night workers across a number of London boroughs at night and two focus groups. These took place on 10th June and 24th July 2024 respectively and featured interviews with cleaners, hospitality workers, and on-demand delivery drivers.

It should be noted that one of the reasons why there is not a healthy body of research into night workers is that they are a hard-to-reach group. Our aim of capturing the experiences of vulnerable groups, particularly those working in the early hours of the morning or in the gig economy was met by several challenges.

The first was a language barrier as many cleaners and gig economy workers did not speak English as a first language, so we needed translators to capture their experiences. Secondly, many were living a busy, hand-to-mouth existence and did not have the time or inclination to complete surveys, which is why face-to-face interviews were the prime means of learning about their experiences. Finally, this group's lack of collective voice is partly as a result of them being insufficiently networked or linked to other organisations that can advocate for them. As a result, there are no umbrella or 'gateway' organisations that can help access them. Those working in the margins of society are hard to find, and it requires considerable effort to reach them and gain their confidence.



Image 1. Night workers in the construction sector (Image Didobi)

6. Survey findings

a. Business Survey

Of the 64 businesses that responded, almost 60% were established businesses that had been trading over ten years. Furthermore, 91% of respondents were either directors (34%), manager/supervisors (33%) or owners (26%). Over two thirds of the businesses surveyed were either small or medium sized-enterprises (SMEs) or micro-businesses.

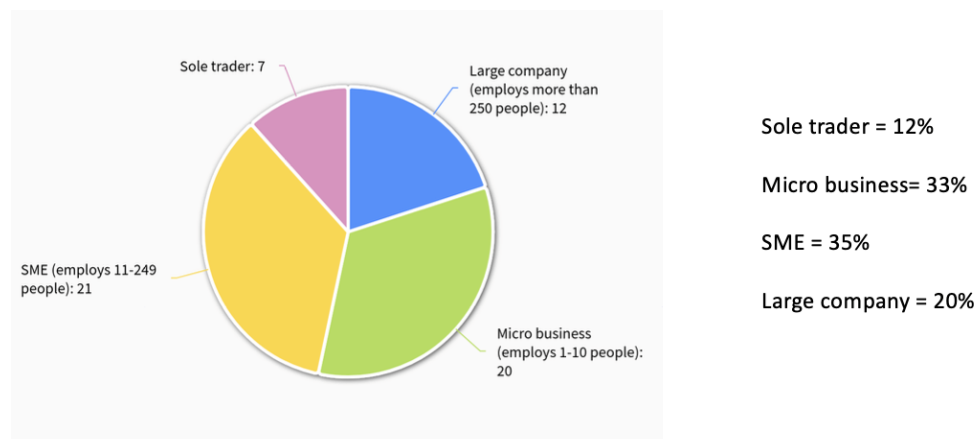


Figure 3. Business breakdown by size of organisation

While a significant proportion of businesses were in hospitality, the range of respondents by business type reflected the diverse nature of night working by covering multiple sectors.

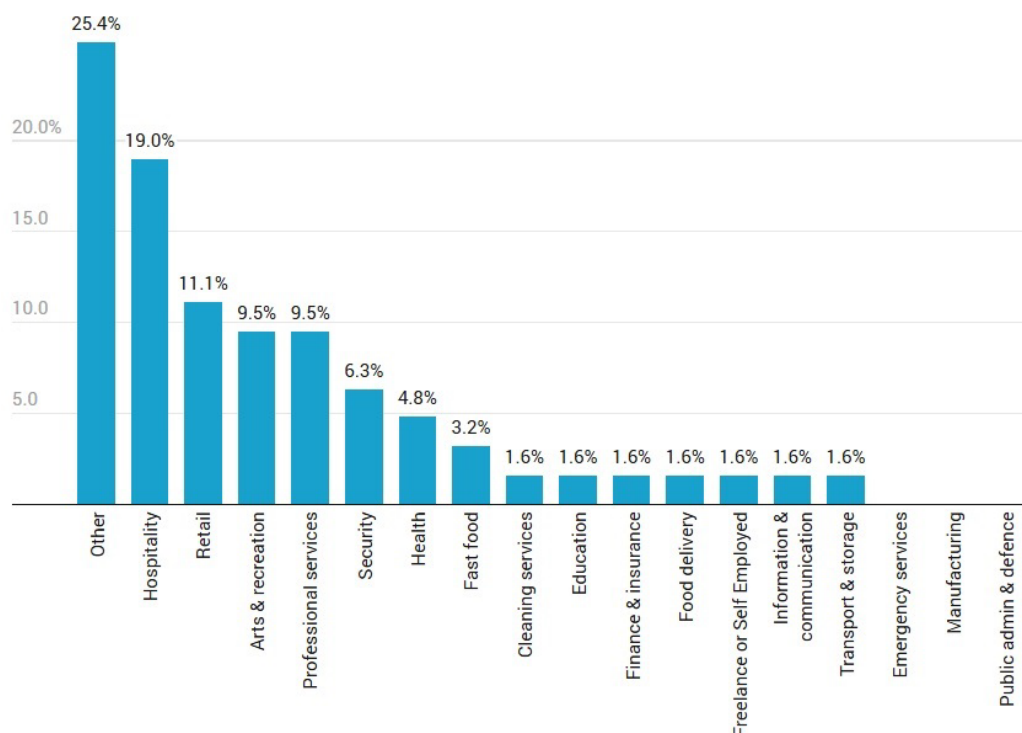


Figure 4. Business breakdown by business type

When questioned on what working practices businesses offered to support night workers, they offered a variety of initiatives, which ranged from fatigue management policies, hot food and rest/welfare facilities (such as tea points, kitchens and showers) to out of hours/remote temporary accommodation including hotels, dual working policies and paying for taxis home.

A quarter of respondents said that they did not pay the London Living Wage. To put this into a wider context, a Trust for London report in 2023¹² showed that 574,000 Londoners in work were paid less than the London Living Wage which is 16% of employee jobs. They reported that 1,296 organisations headquartered in London had been Living Wage accredited.

When asked about best employment practice, over half of respondents said that they were not aware of the Mayor's Good Work Standard. Only 11% of respondents said they were accredited to the scheme.

Accreditation to the Mayor's Good Work Standard

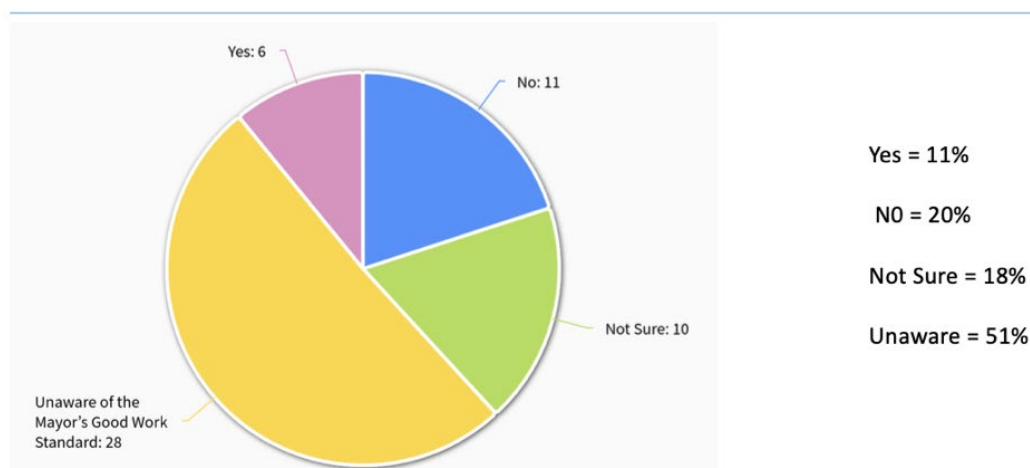


Figure 5. Business responses to accreditation to the Mayor's Good Work Standard

¹² <https://trustforlondon.org.uk/what-we-do/work/london-living-wage/#:~:text=1%2C296%20organisations%20headquarted%20in%20London,of%20the%20campaign%20to%20date>



Image 2. Night worker in Central London (Image Didobi)

b. Night Workers Survey

Our second survey of night workers secured responses from a broad range of occupations with Hospitality, Retail and Food Delivery being among the most popular sectors.

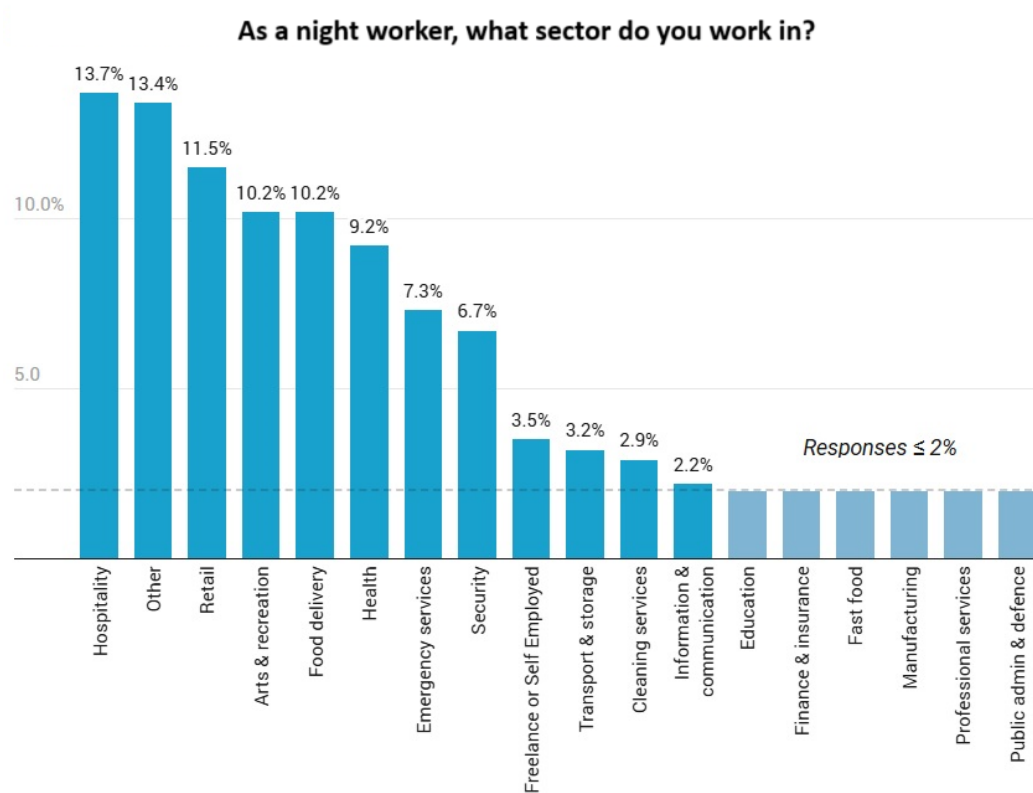


Figure 6. Breakdown of night worker respondents by sector

A broad range of ages responded to the survey with a significant number coming from people aged over 30. Reaching younger people was, however, a challenge along with the fact that many hard-to-reach groups do not speak English. The number of respondents who were students was very low at 6% (full and part-time education).

Sector breakdown by age group

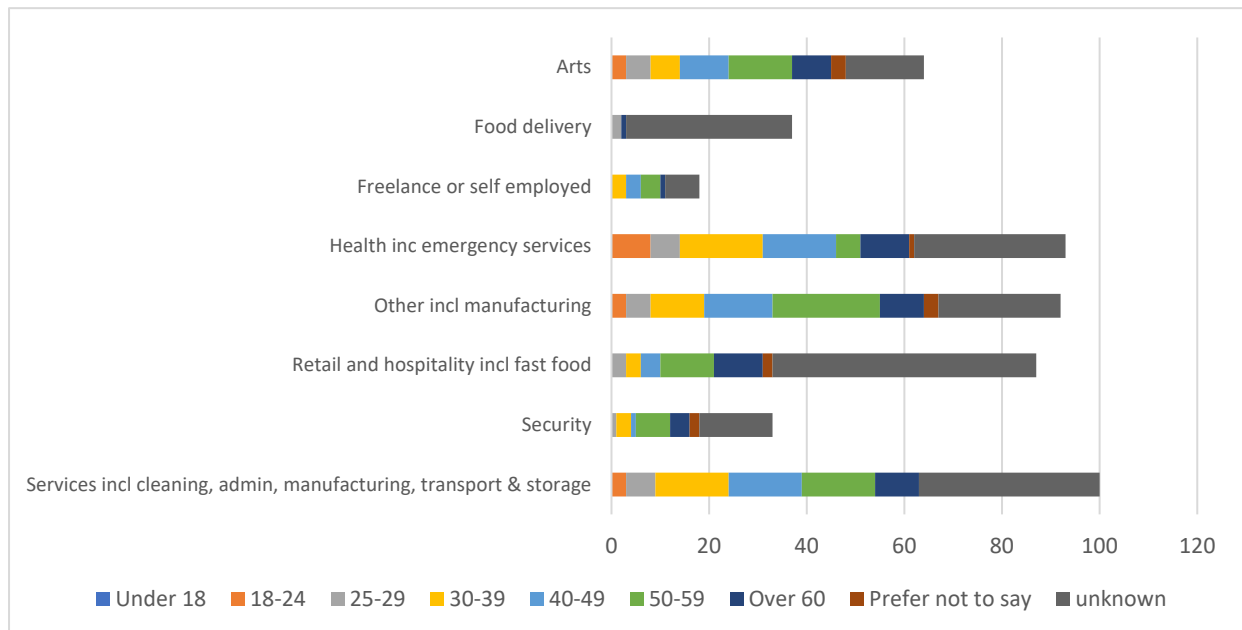


Figure 7. Breakdown of night worker sectors by age group

53% of the survey respondents were worked in the private sector, with Food Delivery and Hospitality the predominant industries.

Most of the respondents worked in companies employing more than 250 people.

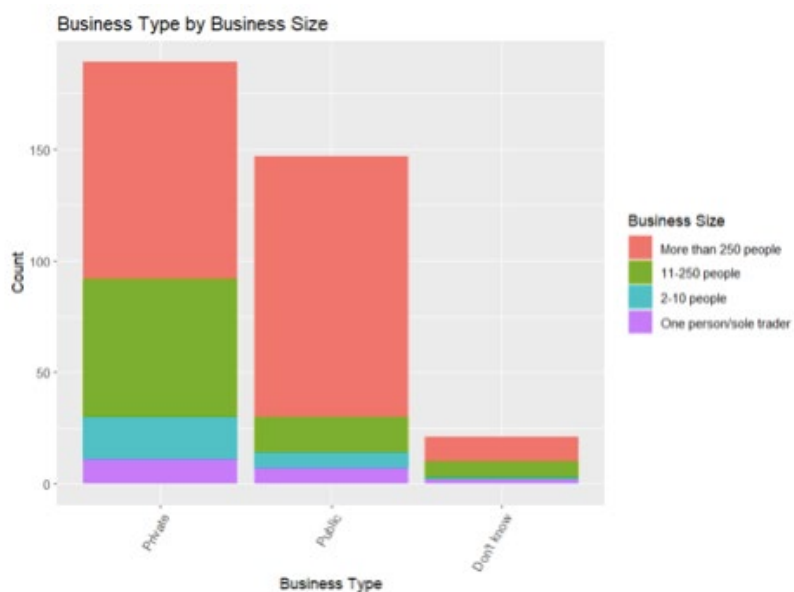


Figure 8. Breakdown of night workers by employing organisation size

The majority of workers surveyed (57%) work both day and night with only 12% working the hours of 11pm-6am only as illustrated by figure 9.

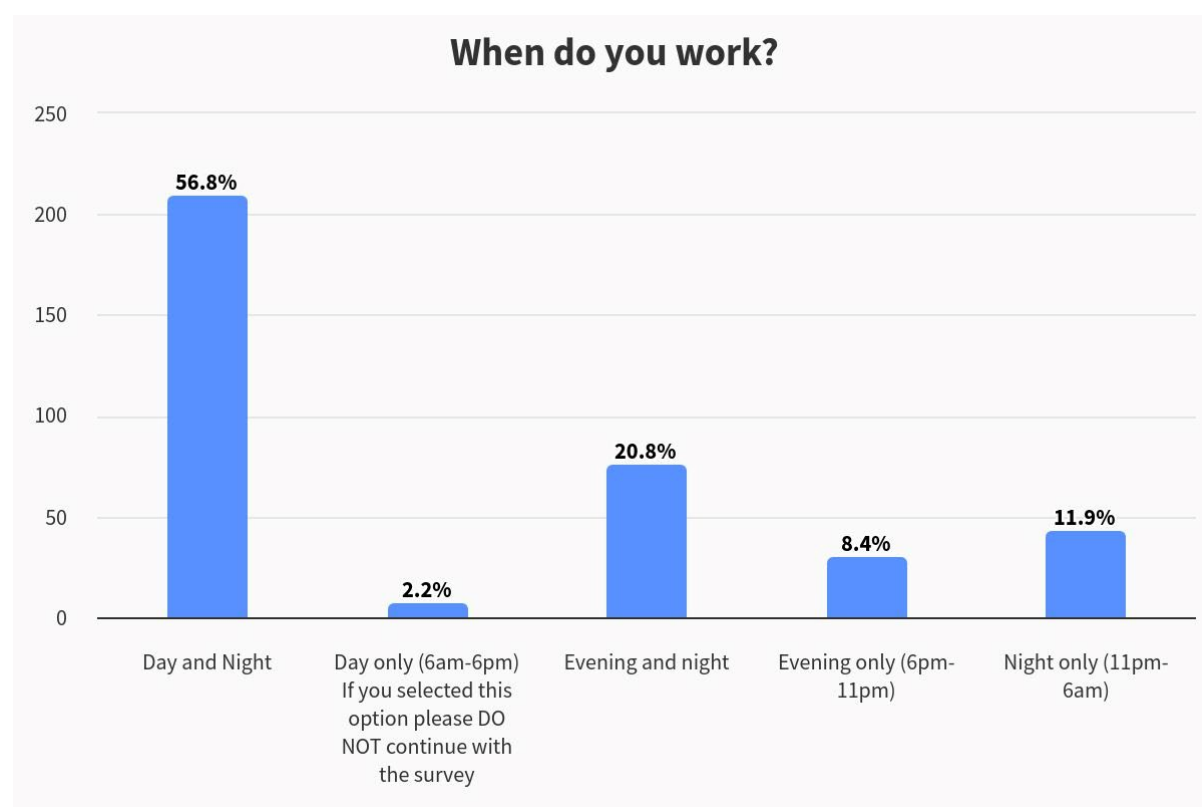


Figure 9. Night worker working times variance

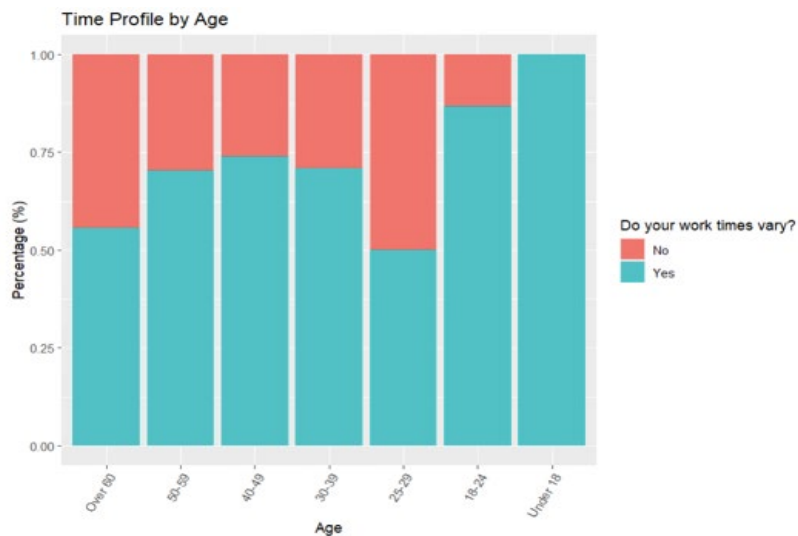


Figure 10. Night worker shift time variance by age group

They also predominantly worked in Central London, as the map of places of work below shows. Furthermore, shift variation was higher among under-18s and 18- to -24-year-olds.



Figure 11. Night worker respondent place of work postcode locations



Figure 12. Night worker home location postcodes

26% of respondents have more than one job. Arts and Recreation, Food Delivery and Hospitality were the predominant sectors where workers had a second job. The over the age of 30 age groups reported having a higher second job rate compared to those under the age of 30.

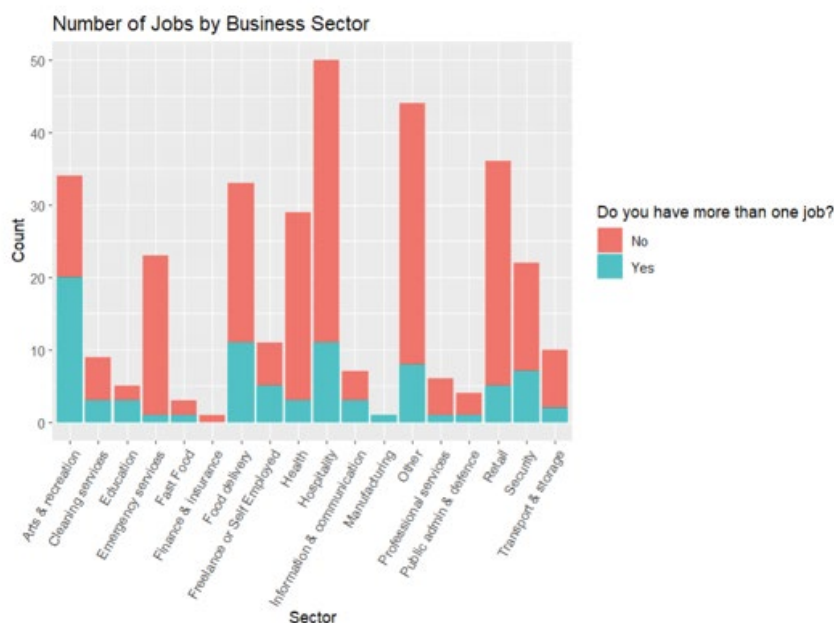


Figure 13. Night worker breakdown by sector and number of jobs employed

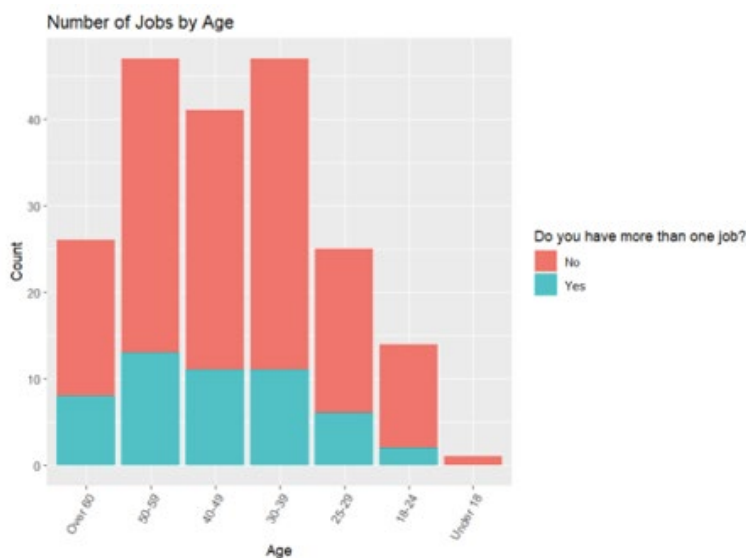


Figure 14. Night worker breakdown by number of jobs and age group

Most respondents (57%) relied on night work to bring in more than 50% of their income. While a further 38% of respondents cited night work as contributing to 76% or more of their income. Dependence on night work income was highest in Food Delivery, Hospitality, Retail and Security. The older age groups are more dependent on night work income than the younger groups.

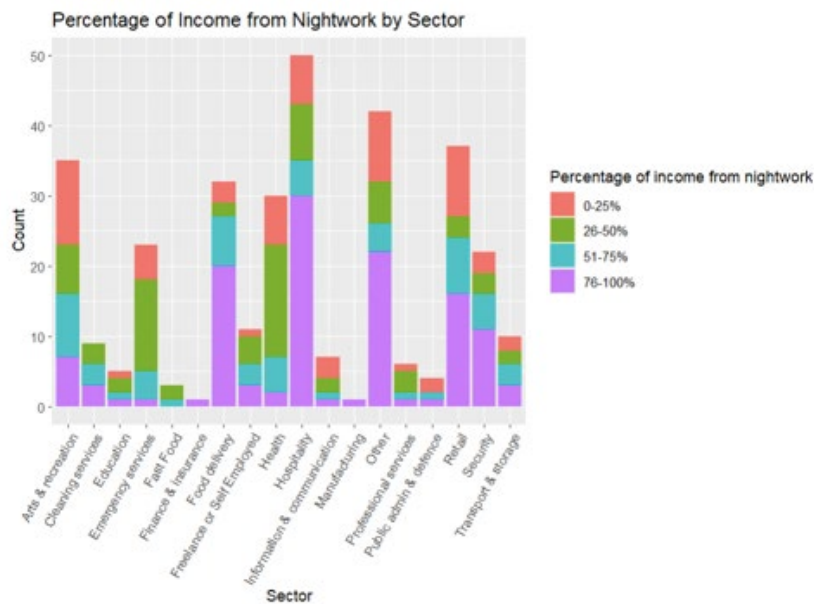


Figure 15. Percentage of income from night work by sector

There is a greater dependence on private sector companies being the major income source for night workers than public sector organisations but of these organisations it is the larger ones that are creating more jobs.

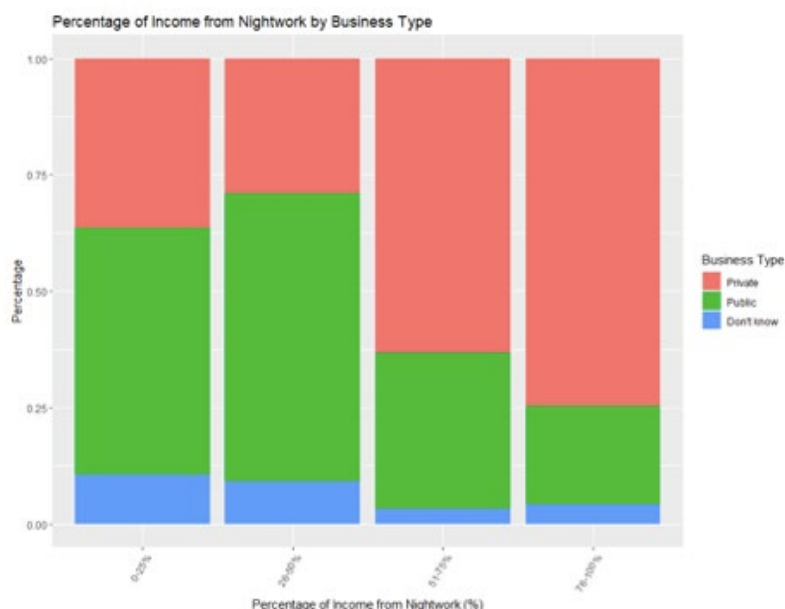


Figure 16. Percentage of income by public and private sector employer of night workers surveyed

Across the spectrum of night work, respondents frequently described their shifts as stressful. Analysis of stress levels at work by sector show Arts & Recreation, Food Delivery, Hospitality, Retail and Security as being the sectors where people feel most stressed.

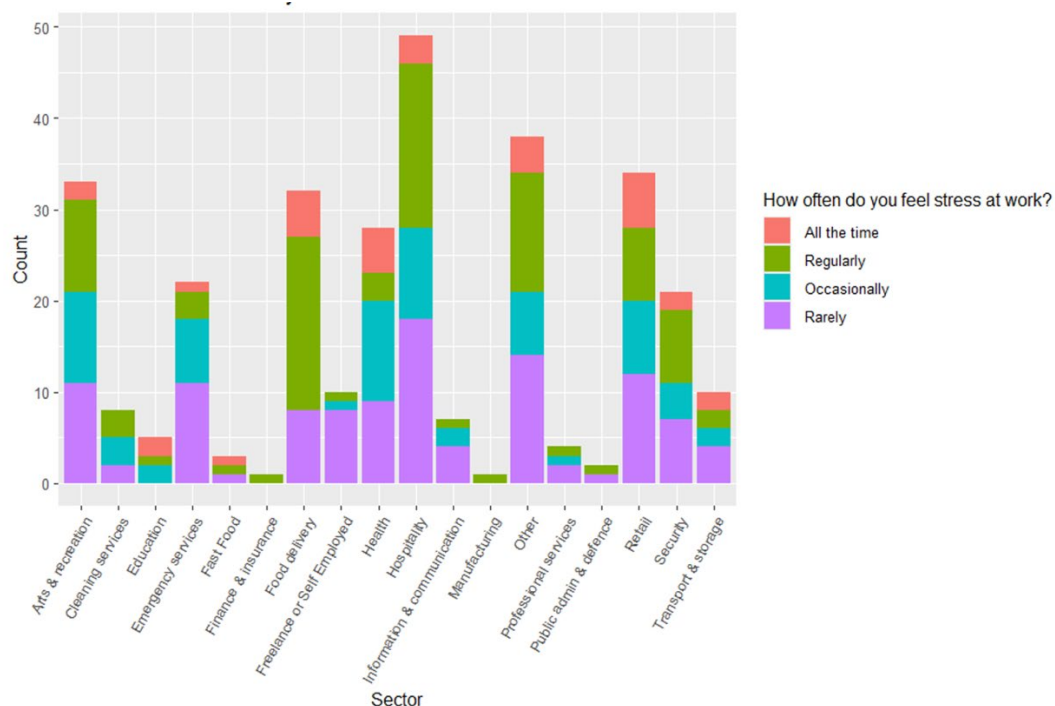


Figure 17. Frequency of stress at work, by work classification

The most stressed age group are those aged 25-29 and the over 50s, with those aged 18-24 the least stressed at work.

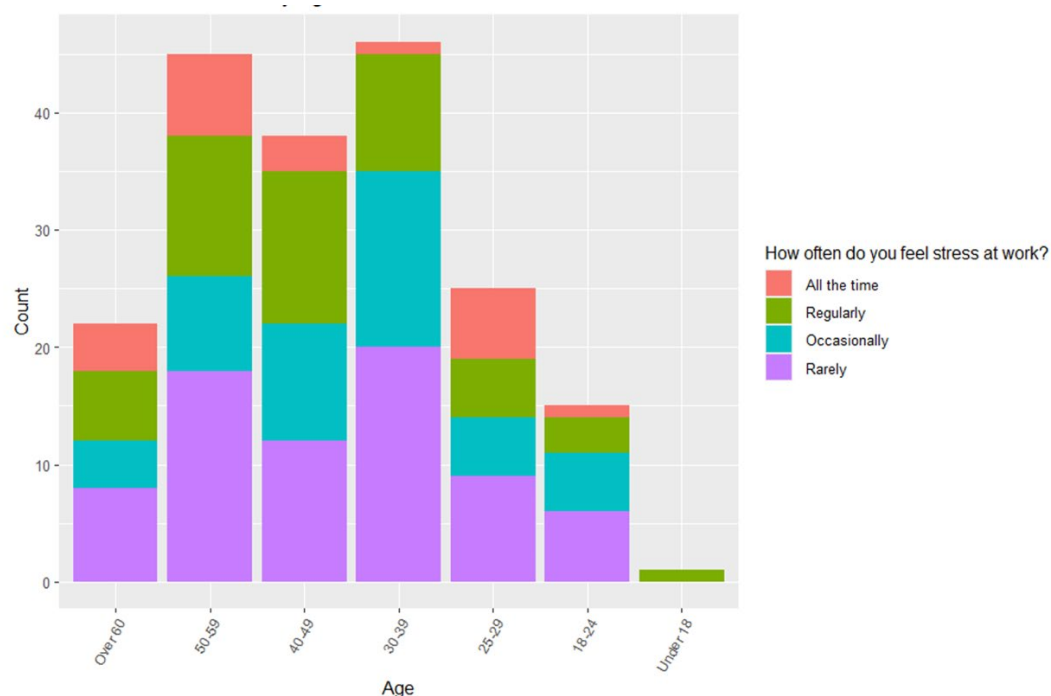


Figure 18. Frequency of stress at work by age group

Those that work in Arts & Recreation, the Emergency Services, Health, Hospitality, Retail (and Other as above) feel most emotionally drained by their work.

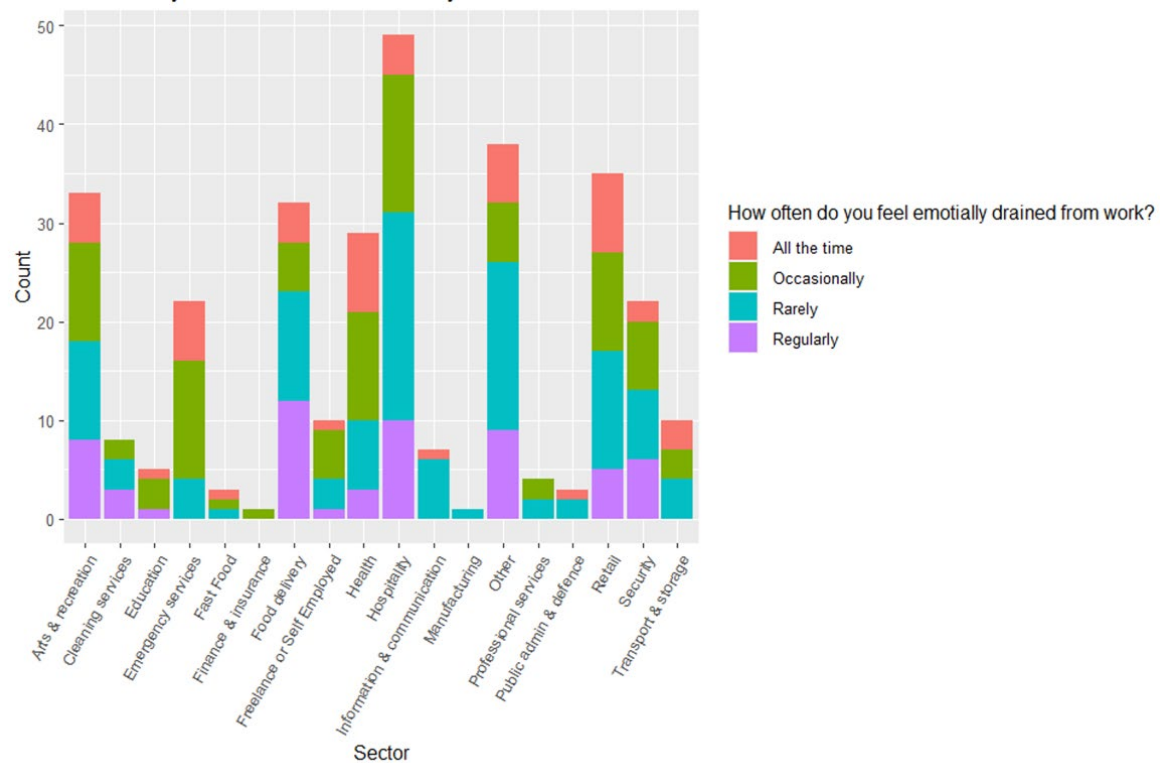


Figure 19. Feeling emotionally drain at work by classification

Analysis by age shows there is a risk of burnout among the 25-29 age group, as they show the highest proportion of respondents that feel emotionally drained all the time.

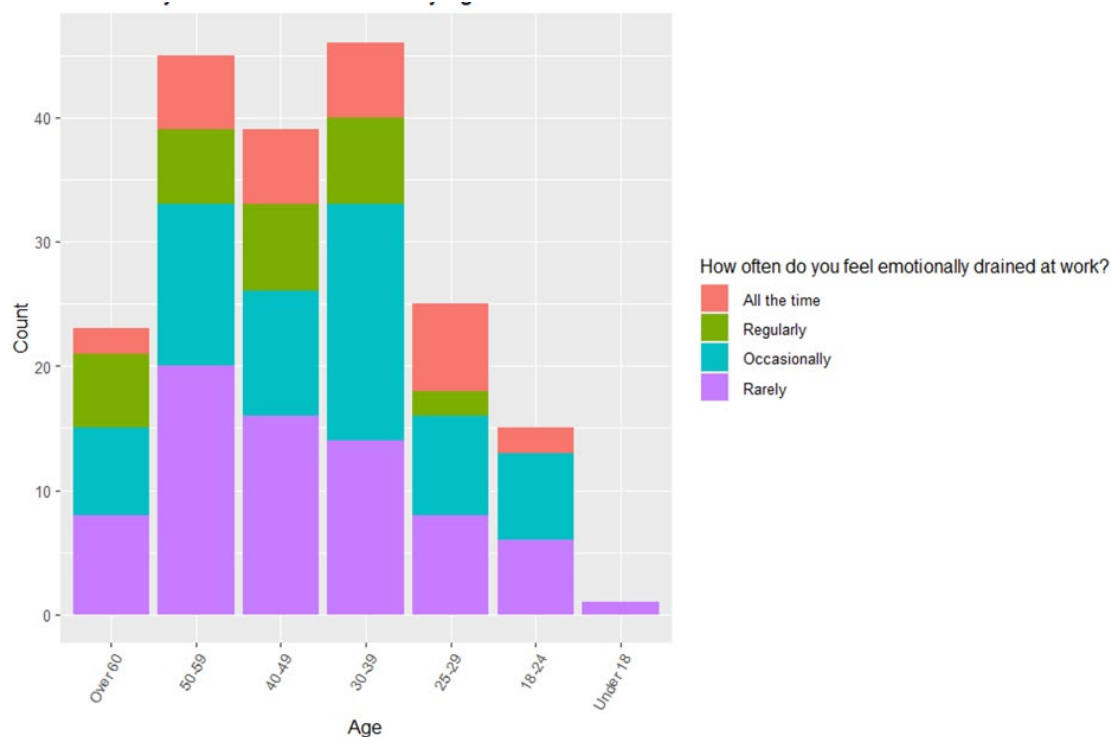


Figure 20. Feeling of emotional drain at work by age group

Feedback also showed there is a correlation between feeling emotionally drained at work and journey time, as those with journeys longer than 120 minutes were likely to feel the most emotionally drained.

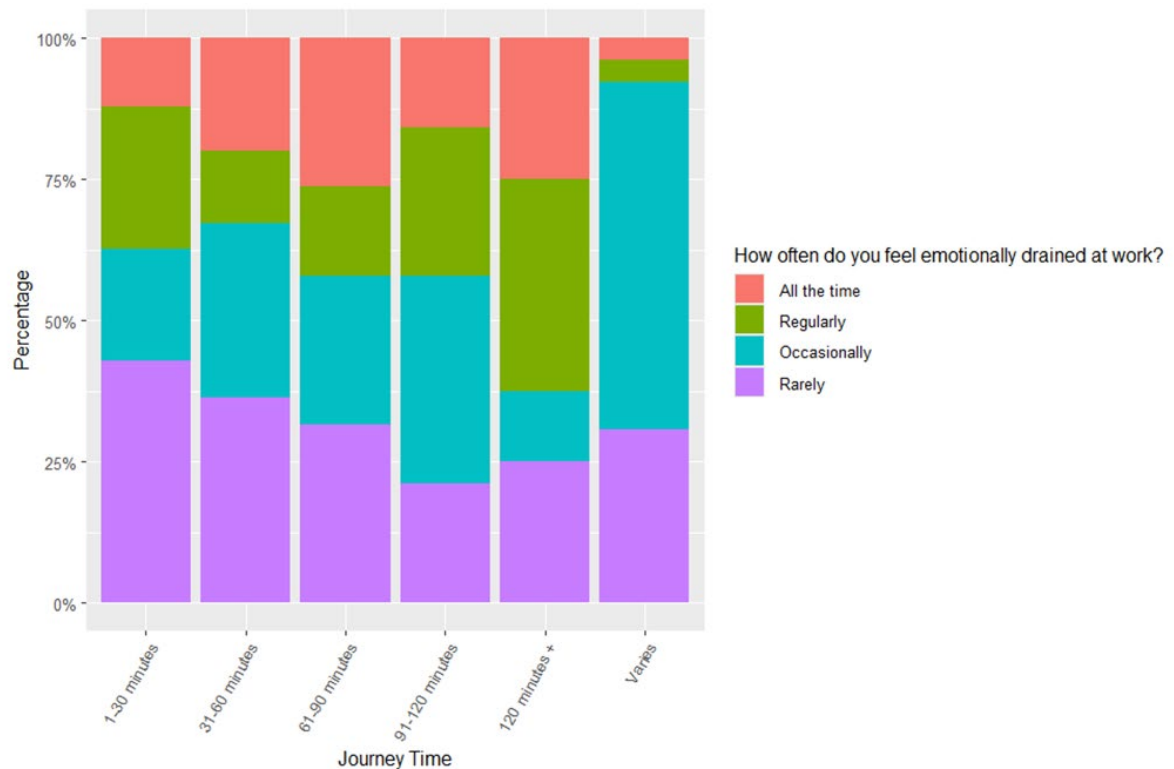


Figure 21. Emotional drain at work by journey time

Analysis of the time that respondents start and finish works illustrates peaks between 3am to 7am and 9pm to midnight. Typically, these times are when public transport operates reduced services or no services at all in the case of trains, the overground and the underground with night bus routes being significantly less than during normal hours.



Image 3. Night refuse collection workers (Image (Didobi))

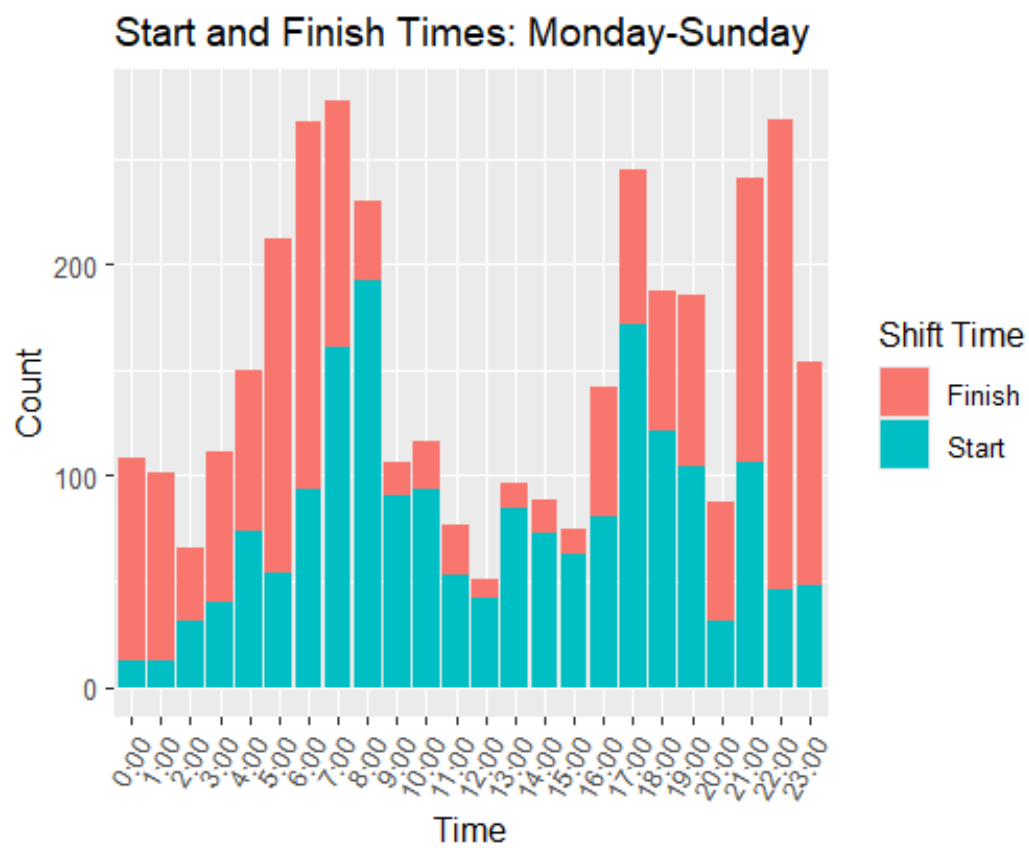


Figure 22. Night worker start and finish work times

Respondents were also questioned about how they got to work. A variety of transport methods were used by night workers, but 62% of these involved public transport. London buses were the most popular form of transport, followed by the London Underground.

A third (32%) of people stated that their journey to work was longer at night. The majority of increased journey time responses related to journeys which were 30 to 120 minutes long.

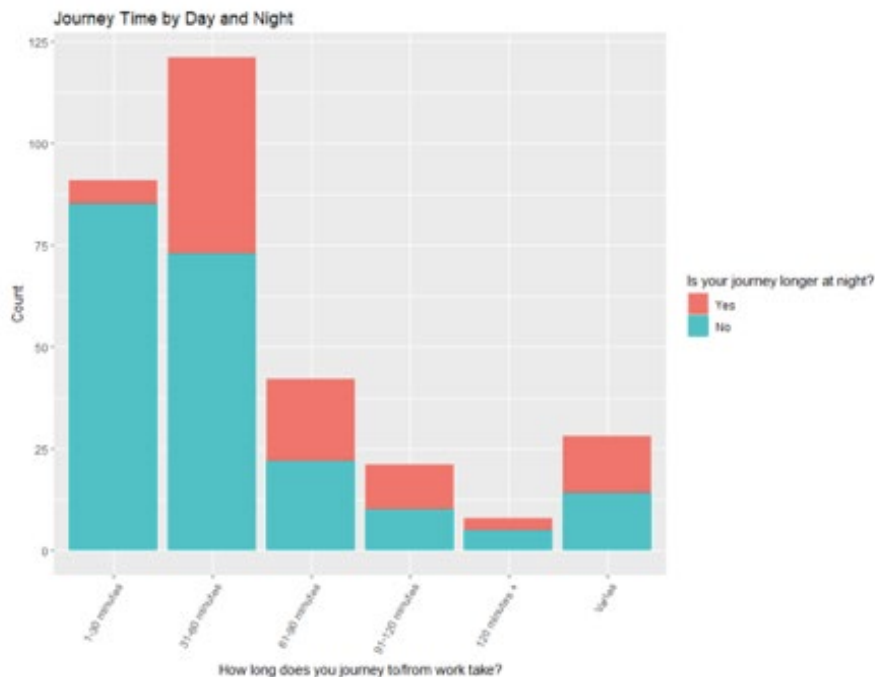


Figure 23. Journey time to work by time period

A significant number of respondents took two or more types of transport to work with the most common journey time being between 31-90 minutes.

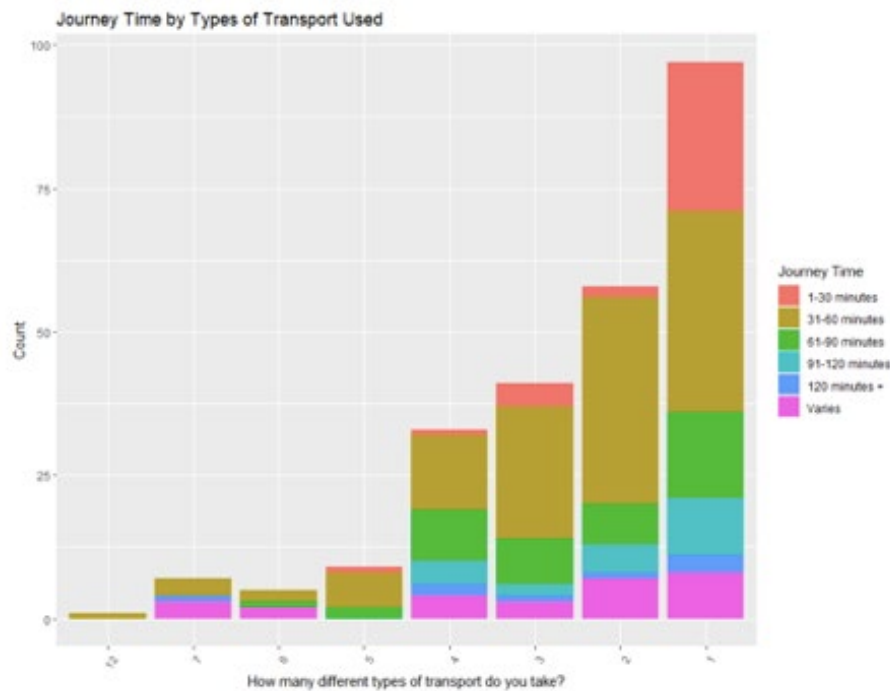


Figure 24. Journey time by number of transport types taken to work



Image 4. A London street at night (Image Didobi)

Although most people described travelling to and from work as safe (18% very safe, 33% fairly safe, and 29% somewhat safe), one in five people (20%) said they felt their journey was more unsafe than safe (11% somewhat unsafe, 7% unsafe, and 2% very unsafe).



Image 5. Night buses in London (Image Didobi)

Of note is that a higher proportion of respondents felt unsafe or very unsafe when taking the bus versus those who travelled by London Underground.

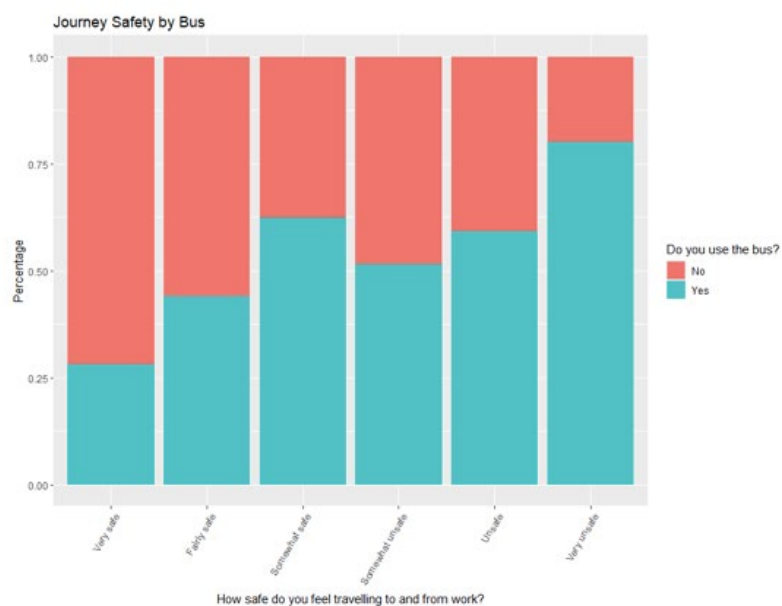


Figure 25. Perception of safety when travelling to and from work by bus

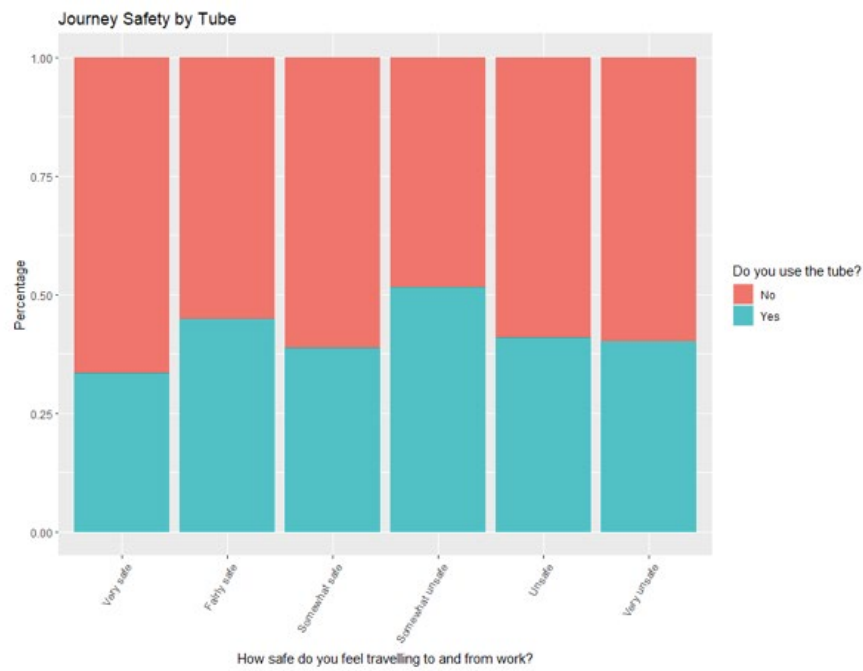


Figure 26. Perception of safety when travelling to and from work by London Underground



Image 6. London Underground at night (Image Didobi)

Also of note is that of those who walk to work tend to feel less safe, but not significantly so.

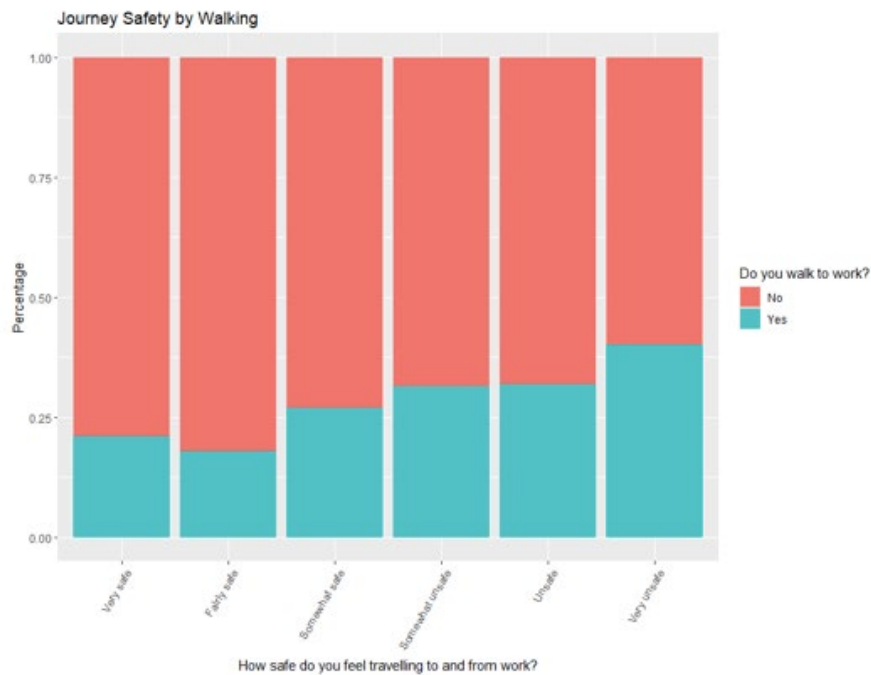


Figure 27. Perception of safety by those walk to work

Conclusion

Our research shows that campaigns for everyone in London to be paid the London Living Wage still has some way to go. While research by the Living Wage Foundation¹³ has shown that one in seven workers are paid below a real Living Wage in London, we found this number was much higher among night workers, as almost one in three were not paid the London Living Wage.

Nearly a third of respondents (29%) were not earning the London Living Wage. A majority (63%) said they had seen a wage increase in the last 12 months but over a third (37%) had not.

Finally, we found that accessing healthy food for night workers was also a challenge. Nearly half of respondents (47%) do not have access to affordable food at work and most (63%) felt their work limits them to consuming unhealthy food when working at night.

¹³ https://www.livingwage.org.uk/sites/default/files/2025-02/employee-jobs-paid-below-real-living-wage-2024_LWF-Research_2025.pdf

7. Focus groups and interviews

In addition to two online surveys, we undertook several days of interviews with night workers across London, speaking to a variety of professionals including delivery drivers, security guards, construction workers, hospitality workers, firefighters and business owners.

Our findings from these discussions showed there was considerable variation in perceptions around safety and fear of crime from area to area. Workers in some of the outer suburban areas, for example, felt safer than those in inner city areas.

Construction workers spoke of getting verbal abuse and things thrown at them and delivery drivers expressed fears about being robbed. Also, some hospitality workers working in LGBTQ+ pubs spoke of an increase in hate crimes and being attacked or abused on the way home.

There was also considerable variation in being able to access hot food. Firefighters, for example, explained how they could eat a proper meal at their base while delivery drivers were reliant on a vendor machine to get hot drinks and snacks.

Others spoke of having to do at least two jobs to be able to pay their rent and some delivery drivers explained how they would do a night shift, get a few hours' sleep and then do another job in the afternoon before starting their evening job again.

Hospitality workers also spoke of struggling to get sufficient hours to make a decent living and being unable to get another job because hours were not fixed. As such, every day was an anxious wait to see if they could get a shift. When they did, they frequently had to manage an excessive number of covers (customers) because the restaurant was understaffed. "They [restaurants] are cutting back on costs because of high energy costs," one explained. "So, we have to do the work of at least two people. It's not much fun and you get lots of complaints and no tips. It's impossible to do a good job because you're so stretched."

Because these were carried out while interviewees were working, we could not go into much detail owing to time pressures. But we were able to explore some of these themes in more depth during two focus groups with cleaners and on-demand food delivery workers.



Image 7. Night cleaner at St Pancras Station, London (Image Didobi)

8. Case study 1: Cleaners

“We are the invisibles,” declared Olivia¹⁴ solemnly as we concluded a 90-minute discussion on the challenges of cleaning across London. She had patiently explained how her small team has to clean multiple floors of office blocks at a high pace in order to complete their work in a four-hour shift. “I have to do seven floors, and it should be a longer shift but we have no breaks and have to work flat out to get it done,” she explains. “I have to do 140 desks in three hours,” added Emilia. “You don’t get a second for yourself.”

This work takes place in the early morning hours when no one is around, and they are not just “invisible” in the sense that no one sees their work but also because they have no recognition or voice.

This manifests itself in myriad ways. If they complain about the working conditions, they are frequently punished by being transferred to a much more difficult block to clean that’s further away from their home. “I had to do a terrible office block where the plumbing didn’t work and the toilets overflowed,” added Maria. “We were told to wear double gloves to unblock the toilets. I had to put my hand down the toilet and unclog the urinal pipes manually.” In other cases, we heard of cleaners being refused maternity pay and told to claim Universal Credit instead. Some were also denied holiday pay and had to chase Human Resources (HR) repeatedly to get it.

Similarly, they recounted a number of examples where working conditions did not meet basic health and safety requirements. “I had just had a caesarean section (C-section) with my baby and was told I had to carry all the heavy cleaning equipment because they didn’t have trolleys,” explained Alejandra. “When I said I couldn’t do this because it was too much, they threatened to cut my hours.”

¹⁴ Names throughout this case study have been changed

Other working rights that most would take for granted were also removed. “We are told that you can’t have toilet breaks and that you can only use a toilet when you are cleaning one,” said Maya. Another cleaner said she was caught having a cup of tea once and was shouted at. There is also little flexibility or understanding shown by employers over hours.

“My son was hit by a car and after he came out of hospital he was scared about walking to school. I asked my boss if I could work earlier hours from 4am to 7am instead of 5am to 8am so that I could take him to school. But he said no,” added Maya.

Childcare was a particularly difficult issue for a several cleaners and many became visibly distressed as they recalled having to leave children at home alone because they were forced to take shifts at short notice.

Around half of them were not paid the London Living Wage and they said that transport was a further problem, as they would have to take several buses to get to work. “It takes a long time. I leave my house at 2am to start work at 4am and finish at 7am,” explained Lucia.

The work is described as physically challenging and “exhausting”. There is a lot of lifting and using an industrial cleaner is physically tiring. They also have to get on their knees to clean the toilets. A number of them have health problems, which they say have been brought about by the job. In one case, a male cleaner was injured at work and was sent to hospital by the supervisor halfway through his shift and told to return as soon as possible. All of them would like union recognition but have been threatened with the loss of shifts by bosses whenever the subject is raised.

Some have also been denied holiday pay and, for those who did get breaks, they were told not to talk to anyone on their 15-minute break. Although some had a good relationship with their supervisors most didn’t, and they said the high turnover of managers made it frustrating and added to their sense of isolation. “We have a new manager every 15 days,” explained one.

Most of the workers were single parents and did the job because of the hours. Working in the night or in the early mornings meant they could get their children to school and be home for them when they finished. They all wanted to earn more money but mostly they wanted have dignity in the workplace.

“All we want is to be treated properly and shown some respect,” explained Maria. “We work hard and deserve it. I haven’t even been shown my contract yet and I’ve been working there over a year.”



Image 8. Food delivery driver in London (Image Didobi)

9. Case study 2: On-demand food delivery drivers

Hassan¹⁵ sighs as he recalls the time his bike was stolen and the pained look in his eyes suggests it's an occupational hazard rather than a one off. "Every day I go to work I am afraid of getting robbed. The only thing on my mind is keeping my bike safe," he says. "The police do nothing. I had a tracker on it, so I know where it is but all they do is give you a crime number and tell you to claim on insurance."

As his voice trails off another driver pipes up. "When my bike was stolen it was outside a well-known restaurant and there was CCTV footage of the person stealing it. But still the police did nothing."

"I knew someone who was punched in the face in the street and had his bike stolen," another one added.

We are sitting in the London offices of Deliveroo listening to a group of on-demand food delivery drivers, known as Deliveroo riders, explain the challenges of night work in the capital. It's a diverse group and they are all young. They are also dedicated riders (who can use bicycles, scooters, car or electric vehicles) who have been in the job for several years, often riding over 100 miles a week. They know London like the back of their hand.

¹⁵ Names throughout this case study have been changed

Their employment status is complicated, though, as a Supreme Court ruling found that Deliveroo riders were not “workers” within the meaning of section 296 of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992. This means they do not have the right to form or join a trade union, although they have a voluntary partnership agreement with the GMB trade union.

The focus group was set up by Deliveroo’s Senior External Affairs Manager and a number of senior staff spoke to us extensively about their wish to raise awareness of safety issues and also raise the status of their workers and banish the stigma attached to being a Deliveroo rider.

Deliveroo riders feel particularly vulnerable to attacks, abuse and robberies.

“I’ve been followed several times when I’m making deliveries in residential areas,” explained Hassan. “Some of them are scary areas and I’ve had to call Deliveroo and say I don’t feel safe. They cancel the order and tell me to get out of the area.”

A number of the riders explain that this happens more frequently in recent years and there are dedicated gangs across London with tools to remove bike locks.

The Deliveroo staff present explain that they cover every area of London, but it is up to the drivers whether they feel safe operating in certain areas. And from the discussions around the table, it is clear that there are some parts of London where riders have had bad experiences. When we asked if there were any areas they didn’t want to work in, every person was quick to respond.

“I don’t want to work in Shepherd’s Bush.”

“I’m not going to Hackney.”

“I don’t want to work in Brixton.”

“I won’t work in Peckham.”

They went on to explain that you could get trapped in housing estates in these areas and “you will be followed by gangs on mopeds without licence plates who are circling the area looking for someone to rob. They will take your bike, phone and any valuables you have.”

Every year 20,000 bikes are reported stolen in London on average¹⁶ and there are many more thefts that are not reported. Fear of crime is a constant emotion in the Deliveroo rider mindset, but this is not the only problem they face. Every day they encountered a mixture of indifference and contempt from the public and their commercial partners.

“There is definitely a social stigma to being a Deliveroo rider,” a rider recently told *The Telegraph* newspaper. “I do feel like an underclass doing it.”

¹⁶ <https://cleancitiescampaign.org/20000-bikes-stolen-every-year-in-london-as-thousands-wait-for-cycle-storage/>

This sentiment was echoed in our group and many offered examples of how the public and restaurant owners treat them with disdain.

“Restaurant staff are always rude,” one explained. “They shout at you and tell you to stay outside while we are waiting for food. Sometimes it’s pouring with rain or snowing and they don’t care. If we ask, ‘how long will it take’ they shout at you again and say ‘do you want to cancel the order?’ It happens every night.”

There is ample evidence of the public complaining about Deliveroo riders being on the pavement or loitering outside shops – but there is a very good reason for this. Despite the on-demand food delivery sector growing since the pandemic this has not been matched with new infrastructure. Deliveroo, UberEATS and Just Eat are now a permanent feature of our economy but our high streets’ infrastructure is still lagging behind.

Waiting rooms and rest areas are not being built – and there is a desperate need for them.

With thousands of active delivery restaurants in London, far surpassing other UK cities, London is possibly the takeaway capital of Britain, and according to the drivers in our focus group, views are starting to soften among the public. “They all use us, so they know what we’re there for,” one smiled.

But this can’t be said for everyone. “Black Cab taxis still try and drive us off the road,” added another. “Uber drivers are fine with us because they operate off a platform too. But cab drivers are just rude. They have this view that we are slowing them down and congesting the roads. They hate us and want to go back to a time when we didn’t exist. Some of them are racist too. They think we come from a certain ethnic minority.”

One of the more disturbing revelations from our discussions was that despite a number of drivers present being victims of racism and theft, they no longer felt they had recourse to the law and there was no point going to the police.

“They won’t do anything. There’s no point,” one shrugged.

This is a source of frustration among Deliveroo bosses as they are keen to partner with the police to help reduce crime – and domestic violence. “Our riders see everything,” one explained. “They could really help tackle crime.”

Rider retention and application rates remain high, according to Deliveroo, and it was clear that those in our focus group liked the freedom to work whenever they wanted and enjoyed riding around London.

But the continuing threats to their safety, abuse from restaurant staff and poor treatment by the police is starting to cast a long shadow over their work.

“We are no threat to anyone,” one rider concluded. “We just want to be treated like everyone else.”

This section clearly illustrates the major challenges that one increasingly significant group of night workers face. It provides more in-depth context to the survey findings. Deliveroo were the only operator to support this research. The lack of willingness to support this research from other operators is a concern and illustrates the lack of transparency and engagement that one would expect from large corporations that employ night workers.

10. Conclusion

London is one of the world's most cosmopolitan cities that requires a round-the-clock workforce to keep it running.

But as our research shows, the dazzling image of London is very much at odds with the harsh reality faced by those on whom the capital is reliant as a 24-hour city. It is clear that many night workers do not have a stake in the capital and are struggling in the margins.

There is a growing number of night workers in insecure work that are very vulnerable, and more attention needs to be paid to this group. Over a quarter of those who responded to our survey had more than one job and many of these are likely to be sleep deprived and living a hand-to-mouth existence.

An emerging profile of these workers shows that most work in Central London and that there is a greater dependence of the private sector for night work. For many workers, stress levels are high, particularly among younger workers in the 25-29 age bracket. Nearly a third of workers are not earning the London Living Wage and are experiencing a breadline existence as a result. Because of this they are forced to take cheaper forms of transport, which often takes much longer than other forms. Some take multiple bus journeys to and from work and this contributes to increased stress levels due to extended travel time and added safety concerns. Our research showed that respondents' experience of travelling by bus, for example, was that it was less safe than travelling by the tube.

Night workers are also denied many of the rights that day workers are accustomed to, such as being able to access healthy food during a shift. Although we don't have precise data on workers who are unionised, it is most likely that a large number of those who responded to our survey operate in a non-unionised working environments and that their conditions do not reflect those experienced by unionised workers.

The emergence of this group is starting to rightly attract interest from policymakers and other groups such as Citizens UK, which has described London as the UK's hotspot for insecure work. With research from the Living Wage Foundation¹⁷ showing that more than 800,000 jobs in London are deemed insecure, it is arguably time that the debate around the capital's night-time economy shifts away from its multi-billion-pound economic contribution to a greater focus on improving the conditions of its workers and hardwiring dignity into every workplace.

The London Living Wage is a great example of grassroots activism driving positive change for workers through churches, mosques, schools and other organisations. It is now over 20 years old, and our research shows there is still more work to be done to ensure all workers are able to earn a living wage.

¹⁷ <https://www.livingwage.org.uk/london%E2%80%99s-living-hours-landscape-exploring-insecure-work-capital>

But the same effort to getting this campaign embedded in London life now needs to be applied to making London a Living Hours city where workers can work enough hours to earn a living. The Living Wage Foundation is leading a vital campaign on this front, but it also needs to capture more interest from policymakers.

And where there is interest, this needs to be communicated to businesses better. The fact that our findings show over half of companies surveyed were not aware of the Mayor's Good Work Standard is a cause for concern.

There is now increased understanding that the value of work must not be measured just in terms of earnings. Our research and other emerging literature on the subject shows that there is a dignity deficit for night workers. Employers must be encouraged more to ensure workers have access to staff rooms, healthy food and legally required rest breaks. Furthermore, it is important to recognise that the workplace extends further than typical office space and for those delivering food and goods across London there is a pressing need for infrastructure improvements.

Waiting rooms and rest areas urgently need to be built for the army of on-demand food and drink delivery drivers that criss-cross London 24 hours a day. It cannot be acceptable as we approach the second quarter of the 21st century that drivers are still being forced to stand outside in the rain and snow, drivers are being forced to urinate in bottles and cleaners are unable to take toilet breaks.

There is currently a policymaking consensus around a drive for growth, and this needs to be accompanied with a drive for dignity that ensures night shift workers are no longer treated like second class citizens.



Image 9. Night cleaner in London (Image Didobi)

This report was researched and written by

Matthew Hopkinson

Matt Baker

Didobi would like to thank Roisin Fellowes (UCL Intern) for her assistance in visualising the survey data.

Contact details

Didobi Limited

7 Bell Yard

London

WC2A 2JR

+44 (0) 203 633 6718

hello@didobi.com

www.didobi.com



Appendix A. Survey questions – Businesses employing night workers

1. How long have you been trading in London?
 - ☐ Less than a year
 - ☐ 1-2 years
 - ☐ 3-5 years
 - ☐ 5-10 years
 - ☐ 10+ years
2. What is your role in the business?
 - ☐ Owner
 - ☐ Director
 - ☐ Manager/Supervisor
 - ☐ Other – please specify
3. How would you describe your business?
 - ☐ Micro business (employ 1-10)
 - ☐ Sole trader
 - ☐ SME (11-249 people)
 - ☐ Large company (employ more than 250 people)
4. What is your business/organisation?
 - ☐ Arts & recreation
 - ☐ Cleaning services
 - ☐ Education
 - ☐ Emergency services
 - ☐ Finance & insurance
 - ☐ Fast Food
 - ☐ Food delivery
 - ☐ Freelance or Self Employed
 - ☐ Health
 - ☐ Hospitality
 - ☐ Information & communication
 - ☐ Manufacturing
 - ☐ Professional services
 - ☐ Public admin & defence
 - ☐ Retail
 - ☐ Security
 - ☐ Transport & storage
 - ☐ Other - please specify
5. Is your business open after 6pm (if no, please do not continue this survey)
 - ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
6. Do you pay your employees the London Living Wage (£13.15 per hour)?
 - ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No

7. What working practices do you adopt to ensure night workers are supported on later shifts? (e.g. risk assessments, rotating shift schedules, training, travel support, limits on night shift hours)
8. Is your company/organisation accredited to the Mayor's Good Work Standard, which commits to fair pay and conditions, workplace wellbeing and skills and progression, and inclusive recruitment practice?
 - Yes
 - No
 - Not sure
 - Unaware of the Mayor's Good Work Standard

Appendix B. Survey questions – Night workers

1. As a night worker, what sector do you work in? Compare to GLA Night Worker research
 - ☐ Arts & recreation
 - ☐ Cleaning services
 - ☐ Education
 - ☐ Emergency services
 - ☐ Finance & insurance
 - ☐ Fast Food
 - ☐ Food delivery
 - ☐ Freelance or Self Employed
 - ☐ Health
 - ☐ Hospitality
 - ☐ Information & communication
 - ☐ Manufacturing
 - ☐ Professional services
 - ☐ Public admin & defence
 - ☐ Retail
 - ☐ Security
 - ☐ Transport & storage
 - ☐ Other – please specify

2. Do you work in the public or private sector?
 - ☐ Public
 - ☐ Private
 - ☐ Don't know

3. Roughly, what size of organisation do you work for?
 - ☐ One person/sole trade
 - ☐ 2-10 people
 - ☐ 11-250 people
 - ☐ More than 250 people

4. When do you work?
 - ☐ Evening only (6pm-11pm)
 - ☐ Night only (11pm – 6am)
 - ☐ Day only (6am - 6pm) If you selected this option please DO NOT continue with the survey
 - ☐ Day and Night
 - ☐ Evening and night

5. Does your work vary between day and night shifts?
 - ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
 - ☐ Other – please specify

6. When do you typically start and finish working?
 Monday 0100 0200 0300
 Tuesday
 Wednesday
 Thursday
 Friday
 Saturday
 Sunday
7. Do you have more than one job?
☐ Yes
☐ No
8. What percentage (%) of your income comes from night work?
☐ 0-25
☐ 26-50
☐ 51-75
☐ 76-100
9. Are you a student?
☐ No
☐ Yes – full time education
☐ Yes – part time education
10. Is your journey to work longer at night compared to the same journey during the day?
☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ If no, how can it be improved? [open text]
11. How long does your journey to and from work take? [open text]
12. Do you feel safe travelling to and from work? SCALE
 Very Safe - Fairly Safe – Somewhat safe – Somewhat unsafe – unsafe – Very unsafe
13. What are the methods of transport do you use to travel to and from work?
☐ London Underground (Tube)
☐ London Buses
☐ London Overground
☐ DLR
☐ Elizabeth Line
☐ River Bus Services
☐ National Rail
☐ Walking
☐ Bicycling including e-bike
☐ Private Car

- Van/Minivan
- Motorbike or moped
- Black cab/Taxi/minicab

14. Do you use the same transport to get to and from work

- Yes
- No – Please specify your return from work mode of transport
 - London Underground (Tube)
 - London Buses
 - London Overground
 - DLR
 - Elizabeth Line
 - River Bus Services
 - National Rail
 - Walking
 - Bicycling including e-bike
 - Private Car
 - Van/Minivan
 - Motorbike or moped
 - Black cab/Taxi/minicab

15. Are you earning the London Living Wage (£13.15 per hour)?

- Yes
- No

16. Have you had a wage increase in the last 12-months?

- Yes
- No

17. How would you best describe your work environment?

- At one location indoors
- At changing locations indoors
- At one location outdoors
- At changing locations outdoors
- All over London
- On a scale of 1-5 (with 1 being least and five is the most), how do the following descriptions match your working environment usually?
Warm, secure and clean
- Stressful
- Cold
- Unsafe
- Quiet
- Busy – lots of people coming and going
- Well lit
- Poorly lit
- Modern
- Dirty

18. Are there any improvements you would like to see in your workplace to make your experience better?

--

19. How frequently would you say you experience these emotions due to working at night?

- ☐ I feel emotionally drained from my work
- ☐ I feel energised by my work
- ☐ I feel fatigued when I get up and know that I have to face another evening shift
- ☐ My work feels meaningful
- ☐ I feel frustrated by my job
- ☐ I feel constantly stressed

20. Have you seen any improvements in your working environment over the last 12 months?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ My work environment meets my needs and does not need improving

21. Do you feel limited to consuming unhealthy food when working at night?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I don't require a meal on my shift

22. Is there affordable food that you can access whilst at work?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Don't Know
- ☐ Other – please specify

23. Are there things you would want to do working at night that you cannot currently do?

24. What is the postcode area of where you live (e.g. W6)?

25. What is the postcode area of where you work?

- ☐ Postcode sector (e.g. W6)
- ☐ Roaming

26. How would you describe your gender?

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Other
- ☐ Prefer not to say

27. Please state your age

- ☐ Under 18
- ☐ 18-24
- ☐ 25-29
- ☐ 30-39
- ☐ 40-49
- ☐ 50-59
- ☐ Over 60
- ☐ Prefer not to say

28. How would you describe your ethnic origin?

White

- ☐ English / Welsh / Scottish / Northern Irish / British
- ☐ Irish
- ☐ Gypsy or Irish Traveller
- ☐ Any other White background, please describe

Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups

- ☐ White and black Caribbean
- ☐ White and black African
- ☐ White and Asian
- ☐ Any other Mixed / Multiple ethnic background, please describe

Asian/Asian British

- ☐ Indian
- ☐ Pakistani
- ☐ Bangladeshi
- ☐ Chinese
- ☐ Any other Asian group/please describe

Black/ African/ Caribbean/ Black British

- ☐ African
- ☐ Caribbean
- ☐ Any other Black/ African/ Caribbean background, please describe

Other ethnic group

- ☐ Arab
- ☐ Any other ethnic group, please describe

29. Do you have any disability?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not sure
- ☐ Prefer not to say



Didobi

SUPPORTED BY

MAYOR OF LONDON

dataafterdark.org
hello@didobi.com