

Working Paper 1

The Unorganised Worker: Problems at Work, Routes to Support and Views on Representation

The Unrepresented Worker Survey 2004

Technical and Methodology Summary and Sample Profile

Anna Pollert and IFF

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**Centre for Employment Studies Research
Bristol Business School
University of the West of England**

Anna.Pollert@uwe.ac.uk

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1 The telephone survey as a survey method

- 1.1 The main objective of this research was to explore the means by which lower-paid unrepresented workers seek to resolve problems encountered in the workplace, if any. Lower-paid workers were defined as those earning at or below the median wage in a job within the past three years, which was set £425 per week for London and the South East and £341 for the rest of the country.¹ A telephone survey was used as the most reliable and cost-effective means of conducting a survey of 500 people. Telephone surveys offer broad access: in 2004 92% of households in the UK had a fixed (landline) telephone (General Household Survey, 2004: Table 4). There were two potential bias factors: first, a telephone survey might exclude those whose first language was not English. However, although IFF was staffed for such a contingency, a language barrier to participating in the survey did not arise. Secondly, the probability of households having a telephone landline is income-related. While 91% of households with gross weekly incomes of between £200 and £400 had landlines in 2004, only 88% did so of those with between £100 and £200 and 78% of those with below £100 (ibid., 2004 Table 4.22). This might bias the sample towards the higher end of the desired pay sample. However, this bias did not actually occur, with very low-paid workers included in the sample (see 6.11).
- 1.2 Random sample was computer generated on known region codes, and then run against the Telephone Preference Service to exclude those who have signed up to this service. Ex-directory numbers are included within the sample. Prior to recent legislation these numbers would be computer dialled to test if each number was a genuine number or not (unobtainable numbers would thereby be excluded). This practice has now been banned so the sample drawn will include invalid numbers. Although not a problem in itself

¹ This is calculated as the weighted average of gross median earnings for 2001, 2002 and 2003 (Labour Force Survey). This is because a threshold had to apply to a job in the last 3 years and the survey was conducted in 2004. The question was asked in hourly, weekly and annual terms and calculated for part-time workers.

(the interviewer records this once it is called and the number is not called again) it does diminish interviewer efficiency.

1.3 There are important issues on the representativeness of the sample. An issue considered was the danger of over-representing those more likely to be at home. For the sake of our purposes this was likely to be the recently retired (the retired would only be of interest for this survey if they finished working in the last three years), part time workers, the unemployed, those recently made redundant and those unable to work through illness, recent injury or disability. There are a number of ways to minimise this effect (see also 2.7, and 3 Fieldwork):

- To limit the amount of sample being used so that instead of e.g. 20,000 names being entered all at once, the first 4,000 names are put into the sample. It is only when this has been nearly exhausted (called numerous times) that the next batch of sample is called. In this way we act against simply obtaining interviews with the 'easier to get / more often at home' group described above.
- Each piece of sample was called at least 8 times before it was withdrawn as being highly unlikely to yield an interview.
- The CATI programming (the computer based telephone interviewing system) was designed so that sample would be called at different times and days to maximise the chance of catching people at home.

1.4 There are no reliable figures on the profile of non-unionised workers with concerns or problems at work. Hence to set quotas (this would be the key way by which the sample would be made to match any known profile) would be imposing on the final achieved sample an unwarranted restriction. Therefore, a random survey was conducted, with only regional representativeness controlled for.

2 Designing the questionnaire

Sampling and screening

2.1 It was understood from the outset that the key challenge in terms of sampling would be finding individuals who fell into our target audience, i.e. who met all 4 screening criteria:

- Had been “unrepresented” at the time, i.e. not represented by a trade union. This was defined as either the respondent *was not a member* of a trade union; or a respondent was a member but *there was no union in the workplace involved in setting pay/conditions AND the respondent’s pay/conditions were not settled or negotiated by a union*. Since it was considered that non-union members might give unreliable answers as to whether there was a union at their workplace, this question was not asked of them. There may, therefore, be non-unionised members in unionised workplaces. Nevertheless, such workers remain Unrepresented for individual problems, since non-members could not obtain support from a union, even if they were in their workplace.² If a respondent was unsure as to whether they had belonged to a union, they were eligible as long as they did not pay subscriptions or a membership fee.
- Had experienced problems at work in the last 3 years.
- Had worked for an employer at the time of the problems.
- Had been earning a “low wage” at the time (as defined by earning below the weighted average of gross median earnings for 2001, 2002 and 2003 in the appropriate region of Great Britain – sourced from LFS).

² ‘Free-riders’ (non-union members in unionised workplaces), have been declining over recent years. In the 1998 Workplace Employment Relations Survey, 26 % of low paid (using our definition of earning below the median) union non-members were in workplaces covered by collective bargaining, but in 2004, this had fallen to 16 % (Li, Y. and Pollert, A.. secondary analysis of WERS, mimeo, forthcoming DTI Employment Relations Research Paper).

- 2.2 Given budgetary restrictions, we needed to be relatively pragmatic in our approach to overcoming that challenge, but we also needed an end-product which would stand up to scrutiny as a robust piece of research.
- 2.3 In order to achieve a random sample of households within Great Britain, a randomly generated sample of residential telephone numbers was used. This did leave us with the further challenges of how to select which individual(s) within the household to speak to in the first instance, while balancing the need for sample efficiency and the likelihood that the majority of people would be ineligible according to our screening criteria.
- 2.4 While the ideal method of obtaining a representative sample would have been to randomly select a member of the household (e.g. by the “next birthday” method), the fact that the vast majority of willing respondents were expected to be ineligible³ made this completely unfeasible in terms of sample and call efficiency – the cost was prohibitive. The main research objective of obtaining participants who met the desired criteria – so investigation could be conducted into their reactions to problems at work – eclipsed the secondary objective of obtaining a profile of people who met these criteria through completely random sampling.
- 2.5 The survey was thus designed to ensure that all members of the household would be screened for eligibility before ascribing the household an “ineligible” status and removing them from the sample. The telephone answerer was asked whether any members of the household had worked for an employer in the last 3 years. If the answer was yes, the screening process continued with the telephone answerer (if they had worked in the last 3 years) or with another member of the household. As soon as the person we were speaking to became ineligible by failing one of the criteria, we then asked to speak to another member of the household who had worked in the last 3 years, and so on, until the household was exhausted or an interview obtained with an eligible person. The first question recorded how many “workers” existed in

³ 95% were in fact ineligible: see table in para 4.3

the household, so that the screening process could be re-iterated an appropriate number of times.

- 2.6 This approach ensured that a random sample of households was achieved and that within each household, adequate opportunity was given to all members of the household to participate. The pragmatic demand of call efficiency was met by a process of proxy-screening: before arranging to call back a household, the person to whom we were speaking was asked whether to their knowledge any other member of the household met the criteria – only if the answer was a definite “no” would we remove that household from the sample (i.e. if the respondent was unsure whether other members had experienced problems, a call-back was arranged).
- 2.7 Maximum representativeness within this approach was assured by a variety of additional fieldwork measures, such as daytime calling, re-dialling a minimum of 8 times and a lengthy fieldwork period⁴. In these ways we acted against simply obtaining interviews with the ‘easier to get / more often at home’ group, and together with the random household sample design, we were confident of obtaining the most representative sample possible within the chosen approach.

Introducing the screening criteria

- 2.8 With the objective of obtaining respondents who had problems at work, the questionnaire wording had to ensure that what respondents understood by “experiencing a problem” was the same as what the University considered a relevant problem at work. A number of considerations were taken into account. Firstly, if we were to ask “Have you experienced problems at work?” some problems the Researchers were interested in, such as lack of opportunities for progression, may not spring to mind. Secondly, the word “problems” itself is quite strong, and respondents were unlikely to ascribe the word “problem” to a variety of issues which were relevant to the survey – this

⁴ For more detail, see para 3.2

issue was magnified by an unwillingness of people in general to admit that they “have problems”⁵. On the other hand, we needed to exclude trivial problems.

2.9 It was therefore crucial to ensure that respondents:

- Knew what types of problems we were interested in; and
- Were not off-put by the use of the word ‘problem’.

2.10 Following cognitive testing to exclude triviality but not deter those who were unwilling to perceive their experiences as, or use the wording of ‘a problem’, the screening question for our research was therefore formulated to be:

“Have any of the following been a difficulty, concern or problem to you in any job you have had in the past three years?”

This was followed by prompts from a read-out list of problems. Hence the approach adopted was to see if they had one of a specified (read out) list of problems or concerns, rather than simply asking if they had any problems.

2.11 Cognitive testing⁶ showed that most of the problems in the read-out list were straight-forward and easily understood by respondents. One exception was problems with “pay”. So that respondents would not respond that they had concerns about their pay if they merely wanted to be paid more, the read-out text was extended to “Pay – such as not being paid the correct amount, not being paid regularly, or not receiving pay for holidays or overtime, etc.” so that respondents understood the variety of pay-related problems we wanted them to respond about.

⁵ This was confirmed in the cognitive testing phase; see para 3.3

⁶ See para 3.3

The DTI approach to “problems”

2.12 During the cognitive testing phase, the screening question used in the 2002 DTI Survey, *Awareness, knowledge and exercise of individual employment right* (Meager et al 2002), was also tested, to see if it could be used to reliably obtain the respondents desired for this study. This would allow consistent comparisons with the DTI research. The DTI survey used an open-ended question:

“Have you personally experienced any problems at work over the last 3 years in relation to your rights at work?”

2.13 The cognitive testing results revealed the following issues with the DTI formulation of the question:

- Respondents who said “No” to the DTI question would answer “Yes” to the University’s question, because they considered the DTI question to be referring to their legal rights and were aware or presumed that their employer was not actually breaking law.
- Without having a read-out list of areas of potential problems, respondents are likely to say “No” even though further probing demonstrated that they *had* experienced one or more of the relevant problems. The cognitive testing showed that people needed prompting to recall all the relevant problems they had experienced.

2.14 As the University did not wish to lose information about perceived non-legal problems, and also did not wish to lose potential respondents due to lack of prompting, the DTI question was not used.

3 Fieldwork

3.1 Interviewing for this study was conducted between 14 October and 24 November 2004, at the IFF Research telephone centre in London. Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing software (CATI) was used, allowing ease of sample management and automatic routing of the complex questionnaire.

- 3.2 A number of measures were put in place to over-come the danger of over-representing those more likely to be at home.
- i. Calls were made every weekday evening from 4pm to 9pm and on weekends from 10am to 4pm.
 - ii. A number of interviewers worked during weekdays to pick up any call-backs for shift workers and those not available on evenings and weekends.
 - iii. The relatively lengthy fieldwork period also helped to ensure a representative sample
 - iv. Each piece of sample was called a minimum of 8 times, at different times of the day, before being discarded as uncontactable.
 - v. The amount of sample being used was limited so that instead of e.g. 20,000 names being entered all at once; the first 4,000 names are put into the sample. It was only when this had been nearly exhausted (called numerous times) that the next batch of sample was called.
- 3.3 Two pre-stages were also conducted. After the initial questionnaire design, IFF conducted a cognitive testing of the questionnaire. This involved 10 interviews conducted face-to-face with respondents. Either immediately after implementing the questionnaire, or during a follow up phone call, these respondents were interviewed about the survey, with discussion focussing on what they understood by certain phrases and certain questions. A more qualitative discussion of the problems they had faced and the actions they took was also undertaken to enable us to see whether the questionnaire was missing any crucial information. These participants were also asked to give their feedback on the flow and style of the questionnaire and anything else they wished to comment on. The results of the cognitive testing were used to hone the survey wording and design before interviewing began.

3.4 A pilot of the study was then conducted between 26 to 31 August 2004, consisting of 47 interviews. Some changes were made to the length of the survey as a result.

4 Sample and call outcomes

4.1 Random sample was computer generated on region codes, and then run against the Telephone Preference Service to exclude those who have signed up to this service. Ex-directory numbers were included within the sample. Prior to recent legislation these numbers would be computer dialled to test if each number was a genuine number or not (unobtainable numbers would thereby be excluded). This practice has now been banned so the sample drawn included invalid numbers. Although not a problem in itself (the interviewer records this once it is called and the number is not called again) it does diminish interviewer efficiency.

4.2 Telephone contacting: During fieldwork, a total of 501 interviews were conducted; a total of 23,130 numbers were used to obtain these interviews. Table 1 below gives more detail on the outcomes of the sample and shows that 13,556 numbers were either unobtainable or refused (59%) and 41% proceeded to further screening. Regrettably, it was not possible to obtain information on those who refused.

Table 1: Survey attempt outcomes as percentage of all dialling attempts

Definite outcomes achieved	23,130	100%
Unobtainable:	4,860	21%
- Dead number/fax/unobtainable number	4,165	18%
- Not available in fieldwork period	695	3%
Refused	8,696	38%
Unobtainable + Refused	13,556	59%
Agreed to be screened	9,574	41%

Screened out	9,073	39%
- no workers	4,908	21%
- self screened	1,602	7%
- household proxy screened	1,093	5%
- no problems	1,013	4%
- earned over limit	322	1%
- failed trade union criteria	135	1%
Interviews	501	2%

4.3 The Screening Process

The first screening question asked was about the number of workers in the household. Of the **9,574** people who agreed to do an interview, **4,908** (51%) claimed there were no workers in their household (21% of contacts attempted – i.e. of the 23,130 dialled numbers).

Excluding households where there were no workers left a potential sample of **4,666** households with a potential worker respondent. Given budgetary restrictions, we needed to compromise in terms of the level of detail of data we could collect through the screening process regarding the eligibility of the population. Thus, in order to reduce the cost of interviewing, if we needed to arrange a call-back to a household, we only did so if there was a possibility that someone in the household would be eligible. We therefore asked the telephone answerer the following screening question before arranging a call-back:

“Before I go, can I just ask you one quick question? We are looking to speak to people who have experienced difficulties, concerns or worries in a job during the last three years. They need to have been earning less than <text sub annual salary for region> per year and not covered by a trade union at the time. Do you / To the best of your knowledge, does/do the worker/s in the household... fit this description?”

If the answer was a definite “no”, these households were not called back, and they are shown in Tables 1 and 2 as the “self-screened” (1,602) and “household proxy screened” (1,093) categories. Thus, 2,695 were screened out at this stage. Thus, of the 4,666 households with workers, 2,695 (57%) were not eligible because they, or the person answering the phone, did not think the worker had any concerns, and/or they earned above the pay threshold, and/or they belonged to a trade union. Thus, 1,971 people were left who were both willing to co-operate and at this stage seemed to fulfil the sample criteria – that is, 42% of the 4,666 households who agreed to be screened.

The next stage of interview was a call-back to speak to a worker. Screening was much more specific, and further weeded out potential participants. At this stage, prompts were given to the remaining 1,971 people, on the 10 problems we wished to investigate. Of the 1,971 workers who had agreed to be interviewed, 1,013 (51%) had not experienced any of the 10 problems in the last 3 years. Thus, just over half of eligible respondents did not participate in the survey because they did not have this type of problem. We do not know how many of those who left the survey at the self or proxy screening stage did so because they did not have a problem.

This left 958 people who had experienced one of those problems. Further screening on pay eliminated 322 (34% of the eligible workers with problems) since they were being paid too much in that job to qualify. *This shows that, had we not wished to confine this study to the lower paid, there would have been many more higher paid workers who could have participated.*

Finally, of the 636 remaining workers, 135 (21%) had been members of a trade union at the time of the problems, and so were not eligible.

Table 2: Screening and exclusion stages of unrepresented worker sample achievement

Dialled Numbers	23,130
Unobtainable:	4,860
- Dead number/fax/unobtainable number	4,165
- Not available in fieldwork period	695
Total contacts made	18,270
Refused	8,696
Agreed to be screened for interview	9,574
Screened out as no workers	4,908
Agreed to be screened for interview - households with workers	4,666
Screened out as not fitting sample criteria, comprising:	2,695
- self screened out*	1,602
- household proxy screened out*	1,093
Screened out not fitting sample criteria as % households with workers	57%
Agreed further interview	1,971
Total with none of 10 cited problems in 3 years	1,013
Total with no problems as % of those who agreed interview	51%
Total with some problems and agreed interview	958
Total with some problems as % those who agreed interview	49%
Earned over limit	322
Earned over limit as % total with problem, eligible for interview.	34%
Total eligible by 'problems' and 'earning limit'	636
Total who failed non-union criteria	135
Total who failed non-union criteria as % those eligible for interview by 'problem' and 'earning limit'	21.2%
Total interviewed who passed all criteria	501
Total interviewed as % those who agreed interview left after screening	25.4%

*These eliminated themselves or eliminated others in the household because they thought they or others in the household who worked had no problems at work, and/or earned above the earnings maximum for their region and/or worked where they were 'covered by a trade union'.

The final 501 people interviewed were thus 25 % of the 1,971 who agreed to be interviewed and appeared at first screening to fit the survey criteria, i.e. three-quarters had to be eliminated because they failed the criteria.

4.4 **Interview Lengths** The average interview length was 23.5 minutes (ranging from 14 minutes to 56 minutes).

5 Demographic Targets

5.1 As the sample was drawn based on region, we were able to draw sample in sufficient quantities to enable a geographically representative spread across Great Britain. Table 3 below shows the targets requested by the London Metropolitan University and the actual number of interviews achieved.

Table 3: Regional profile

Government Office Region	Target	Achieved	
England	86.3%	428	85.4%
East Midlands	7.3%	41	8.2%
East of England	9.5%	48	9.6%
London	12.9%	62	12.4%
North East	4.40%	23	4.6%
North West / Merseyside	11.8%	61	12.2%
South East	14.0%	70	14.0%
South West	8.6%	34	6.8%
West Midlands	9.1%	43	8.6%
Yorkshire and Humberside	8.7%	46	9.2%
Scotland	8.7%	43	8.6%
Wales	5.1%	30	6.0%
TOTAL	100%	501	100%

- 5.2 In terms of gender and ethnicity, targets were not set for 2 main reasons:
- vi. Without knowing the demographic profile of “low-paid unrepresented workers with problems” in Great Britain, to set targets based on demographics would have been imposing an unwarranted restriction on the final achieved sample, and may have had the effect of giving an unrepresentative sample. For example, if a predominance of female workers experiencing problems at work existed and we imposed a restriction of 50% females in the sample, this finding would not have been revealed.
 - vii. Considering the stringent screening criteria demanded by the survey design, to impose yet more restrictions based on demographics would have been more costly and time-consuming in terms of finding eligible respondents.
- 5.3 For these reasons, gender and ethnicity were left to “fall out” naturally according to who met the screening criteria (low paid workers without trade union representation who had experienced problems at work in the last 3 years). Table 4 shows the demographic profile achieved.

Table 4: Demographic profile

	Achieved
Male	39%
Female	61%
White	91%
Mixed	2%
Asian or Asian British	4%
Black or Black British	2%
Chinese	1%
16 to 18 years old	3%
18 to 21 years old	6%
22 to 29 years old	17%
30 to 39 years old	23%
40 to 49 years old	25%
50 to 64 years old	25%
65 or older	1%

7. Profile of the Sample

Table 5: Comparison of the characteristics of low-paid unrepresented workers who had problems with all low paid, unrepresented workers and the workforce as a whole (comparisons for 2004, Labour Force Survey).

	Unrepresented workers survey	Low paid, unrepresented workers (LFS)	All workers (LFS)
Individual characteristics			
Male	39.12	42.14	53.77***
Female	60.88	57.86	46.23***
Age			
<25	16.53	29.71***	14.27**
25 - 34	20.36	19.63	21.83
35 - 44	23.79	20.1	26.32
45 - 54	24.4	15.89***	21.91
55+	14.92	14.86	15.67
Highest educational qualification¹			
None	14.11	14.84	10.13
NVQ level 1 equivalent	5.44	19.69	13.88
GCSE/ NVQ level 2 equivalent	31.05	20.87	15.36
A level/ NVQ level 3 equivalent	24.19	22.72	22.24
Higher education	21.77	13.34	30.25
Other	3.23	-	9.14
Ethnicity			
Non-white ethnic minorities	8.78	6.42***	7.07**
White	91.22	93.58***	92.93**
Job characteristics			
Sector²			
Public sector	17.67	15.87	24.19***
Private sector	82.33	84.13	75.81***
Industry			
Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	1.44	1.61	1.34
Manufacturing	14.43	13.42	13.57
Construction	3.3	6.9***	8.07***
Retail, wholesale and distribution	18.76	25.69***	13.45**
Hotels and restaurants	7.01	8.75	4.35***
Transport and communications	4.95	5.27	6.75

	Unrepresented workers survey	Low paid, unrepresented workers (LFS)	All workers (LFS)
Financial intermediation	3.51	2.7	4.18
Other business services	9.07	8.97	11.46
Public administration	5.98	3.34***	7.04
Education	8.04	6.42	9.09
Health and social services	17.11	11.38***	12.09***
Other community services	6.39	6.52	5.6
Workplace size			
<10 employees	21.76	29.87***	19.01**
10 - 24 employees	20.39	18.23	12.63***
25 – 49 employees	14.87	15.25	12.66*
50 – 249 employees	28.72	21.22***	21.48***
250 – 499 employees	6.11	6.3	7.11
>499 employees	8.15	8.31	15.75***
Occupation			
Managers and senior professionals	6.68	5.8	14.95***
Professionals	4.05	2.22**	12.41***
Associate professional and technical occupations	7.89	5.92*	13.79***
Administrative and secretarial occupations	18.42	17.53	12.62***
Skilled manual occupations	7.49	9.94	11.55***
Personal services occupations	16.40	11.4***	7.61***
Sales and customer services occupations	12.96	16.17	7.85***
Semi-skilled occupations	9.51	8.69	7.48*
Un-skilled occupations	16.60	22.3***	11.67***
Full-time job	78.34	61.97***	76.11
Part-time job	21.66	38.03***	23.89
Non-standard employment contract	11.45	7.77***	5.27***
Job tenure during problems ##			
6 months or less	37.55		
6 months – 1 year	10.84		
1 – 2 years	15.86		
3 – 5 years	20.08		
6 – 10 years	8.63		
11+ years	7.03		

n.b. 'Low-paid' defined as earning below the median pay level in 2004; 'Unrepresented' means non-union members. The LFS pay comparison with the Unrepresented Worker Survey is not perfect, since the pay calculation for the latter referred to any job in the 3 years previous to the survey. The screening pay levels were calculated for London and Rest of Country on the average of the medians for the 3 years 2002, 2003 and 2004. Nevertheless, the differences with the LFS figures are small.

Comparison with LFS not possible since the URWS asks about length of time in post when problems occurred, whereas the LFS asks length of service in current job.

1. Responses here are not strictly comparable as the LFS asks a much more detailed set of questions about qualifications. Because of these differences, no significance tests were performed on these variables

2. Differences between the URWS and LFS here may arise from differences in the questions. The URWS asks if workers work for private contractors in the public sector, respondents who are categorised as being in the private sector. In the LFS workers in these jobs may classify themselves as working in the public sector.

* - Difference compared to the unrepresented workers sample is statistically significant at the 10% level or better.

** - Difference compared to the unrepresented workers sample is statistically significant at the 5% level or better.

*** - Difference compared to the unrepresented workers sample is statistically significant at the 1% level or better.

Results are based on Chi² tests.

Gender composition and distribution across the sample

Women comprised 61% of the sample, just above the 58 % of the comparable non-unionised, low paid workers in the LFS (2004, Table 5).

The percentage also coheres with other studies of lower paid workers with problems at work: the West Midlands Employment and Low Pay Unit found that women comprised 58% of callers to its employment helpline in 2000/2001, although they were only 52% of the West Midlands workforce (Russell and Evers, 2002

Both sexes were similarly distributed across different workplace sizes, although women were slightly more likely than men to work in the small workplaces (fewer than 25 workers): 39% of men, 43% of women.

Men were more likely to work in manufacturing than women (24% compared with 7%), while women were more likely to work in the service sector – 25% in health and social work (4% of men), 10% in education (5% of men), 9% in hotels and restaurants (4% men) and 5% in banking (2% men). The same proportions (18%) of men and women worked in wholesale and retail.

Gender segregation was similar for both sexes - 56% of men worked in mostly male workplaces and 52% of women worked in mainly female workplaces. About a third of each sex worked in mixed-sex workplaces.

More women worked in the public sector than men (20% of women, 13% men) and in companies working for the public sector (16% against 9%), a category created to describe the now widespread existence of contracting to the public sector following privatisation.

Women were also more likely than men to work in the voluntary sector (7% compared with 2% of men).

Men were primarily employed in the private sector (76% compared with 56% of women) (survey Table 1/306).

In terms of occupational distribution, similar proportions of men (6%) and women (7%) were managers – although it must be recalled that the median-earnings maximum would place these at lower levels. There were few among professionals (5% of men, 4% of women) and slightly more among associated professional and technical occupations (6% of men and 9% of women). Gender contrasts were evident for administrative work (only 9% of men but 24% of women), the skilled trades (15% of men but only 3% of women), personal services (4% of men, but 24% of women), process and machine operatives (17% of men and 4% of women) and elementary occupations (24% men, 11% women).

Age

The age distribution was similar to that for low-paid unorganised workers in the labour force (LFS, 2004, Table 5). However, young workers (below 25 years) were under-represented in the sample (17%) compared with their representation in the low-paid, non-unionised workers as a whole (30%). This could either be because few in this portion of the workforce regard themselves as having problems, but the difference is so large that it suggests a sampling problem. The likeliest explanation is that fewer of this age and income group had fixed telephone lines. More may have been included in the sample had access via mobile phones been possible. Another difference was the significantly larger proportion of 45-54 year olds in the sample compared with their equivalent in the labour force.

The age distributions among men and women were similar, as were qualification levels.

Qualifications

No significance tests were performed here (see Note 1) because the sample and the LFS could not be properly compared.

Ethnicity

There were significantly more ethnic minority workers in the sample than in the equivalent section of the labour force, which suggests either a stronger perception of or greater likely of having employment problems among these workers.

Public and private sector

There were significantly fewer low-paid unorganised workers in the public sector, in both the sample (i.e. those with problems) and in the labour force than in the labour force as a whole and significantly more in the private sector (Table 5). This largely reflects the higher unionisation of the public sector. The inclusion in the sample of the voluntary sector, and of workers in private companies contracted to the public sector makes comparison with the LFS, which does not ask these questions, problematic. Private contractors have been added to the private sector here (Note 2).

Industry

Table 5 shows that the composition of the sample in terms of industry was similar to low-paid, non-unionised workers in the labour force, except for a significant under-representation in construction. The distribution sector had a lower representation than in the low paid, non-unionised part of the labour force, although this was still significantly greater than in the labour force as a whole. The hospitality sector had a significantly higher presence in the sample and among low paid unorganised employees in the labour force than in the labour force in general. The patterns here are consistent with low union membership density in these industries (11% in Distribution and 4% in Hotels and Restaurants) and with research that identifies problematic industrial relations and low pay here (DTI, 2006, Table 10, Earnshaw et al, 1998, Edwards et al, 2002, Ram et al, 2004). Of considerable interest was the finding of significantly more workers in the sample from public administration and health and social services, than in the wider labour force of low-paid unorganised workers, which suggests either a high proportion of problems or high awareness of problems.

Workplace size

The vast majority (42 %) of the sample worked in small workplaces with fewer than 25 people, a similar although lower figure than the 48 % of low-paid, non-unionised workers in the labour force (Table 5). However there were significantly *fewer* people in the smallest size-band than among low paid unorganised workers in the wider labour force. There were also significantly *more* workers in the sample than in the equivalent section of the LFS in the medium-sized workplace of 50-249 employees.

Occupation

While the sample was similar to the equivalent section of the LFS in the low representation of senior occupational groups, such as managers and senior professional, there were a significantly larger proportion of professionals and associate professionals in the sample than among low paid unorganised workers in general, Table 5). Personal service workers were over-represented while unskilled workers were under-represented compared to low-paid, unorganised workers in general – both at a high degree of significance.

Contractual terms

Full-time workers had a similar presence to the labour force in general and a higher one than among low paid, unorganised workers in the LFS, while part-time workers had a similar presence to the general labour force but a lower one than among low paid unorganised workers in the labour force, Table 5). Those with 'non-standard' contracts, including temporary and agency workers, had a significantly higher presence in the sample than in either the general labour force or among the low-paid, unorganised in the labour force. They were divided between 4% Fixed Term contract workers, 4% Agency workers and 2% Casual or Seasonal workers ('others' making up the rest). Men and women were fairly evenly spread between these contractual conditions.

Job tenure

Although comparison cannot be made with the LFS, since our question on length of service related to the time of the problems experienced, whereas the LFS asks tenure at the time of the current job, we noted the very high proportion (48.3%) had been in their job for less than a year when they experienced their problems and (37.6%) had been in post for less than 6 months.

The high presence of those with short tenure is consistent with the low unionisation of those with few years of service: only 11.4% of those with less than one year's service were unionised in 2005, and 17.1% of those with one to two years. This rises to 43.2% for those with ten to twenty years and 58.2% for those with over twenty years of service (DTI, 2006, Table 12). However, the substantial further over-representation of short-service workers in the sample suggests that they are more likely to experience problems at work than others. The combination of low unionisation for those with less than a year's service, and exclusion from key areas of statutory protection, such as from unfair dismissal, are key factors in exposing this group to potential problems at work.

Young workers were more likely to have been in a job for less than a year: those under 22 years old comprised 9% of the sample, but 15% of those with less than a year's service, and those between 22-29 years were also slightly over-represented here (17% of the sample, but 20% of below a year's tenure).

Multiple demographic variables

The ethnic composition differed for men and women: 87% of men were white, compared with 94% of women, and the 13% of non-White males comprised 3% Mixed, 6% Asian and 4% Black, while the groups were evenly spread with 2% in each group among women. Slightly more men than women described themselves as disabled (14% and 10%). Length of service was similar for each sex, but more men (32%) had less than 3 months' service than women (23%). Resembling the picture in the wider labour force, 41% of women worked part-time, compared with 10% of men, and 85% of part-time workers in the sample were women. While women were 61% of the sample, they comprised just 53% of full-time workers, and while men were 39% of the sample, they were 47% of full time workers. Twenty eight percent of women had caring responsibilities compared with 13% of men.

Pay

The pay threshold of those earning at or below the median wage was £425 per week for London and the South East and £341 for the rest of the country.⁷ Hourly pay was calculated on the basis of information given on working hours and median pay was £5.77 per hour. The hourly pay bands started at an extremely low wage, well below the Minimum Wage. These were: Band 1: £1.97-£4.92; Band 2: £4.93-£5.76; Band 3: £5.77-£7.20; Band 4: £7.21-£12.00.⁸

⁷ This was calculated as the weighted average of gross median earnings for 2001, 2002 and 2003 (Labour Force Survey). This is because a threshold had to apply to a job in the last 3 years and the survey was conducted in 2004. The question was asked in hourly, weekly and annual terms and calculated for part-time workers.

⁸ Note: information needed to calculate hourly pay was available for 460 respondents – 92% of the sample. Pay referred to the job with the problem, which could be any one experienced in the previous 3 years. The UK National Minimum Wage for adults over 21 was: £4.84 in 2004, £4.50 in 2003, £4.20 in 2002 and £4.10 in 2001. For young workers (18-21) it was £4.10 in 2004, £3.80 in 2003, £3.60 in 2002 and £3.50 in 2001. in 2004 it was £3.00 for 16-17 year olds.

Just under half the sample (45%) were full-time workers earning in the top two pay quartiles. Put another way, 96% of the top two pay quartiles were full-time workers. Nevertheless, over a quarter of the sample (26%) were full-time workers earning in the bottom two quartiles – a substantial minority. Interestingly, similar percentages of the sample earning in the bottom quartile, which was close to, or below the minimum wage, were full-time and part-time workers (11% and 12% respectively). The pay distribution showed the predictable disadvantage of part-time workers: 51% of part-time workers (based on self-reporting) were in the lowest pay quartile, 31% in the second to bottom, and only 8% were in the top two. By contrast, 59% of full-time workers were in the top two quartiles, 19% in the second to bottom, and 14% in the bottom one.

Women's earnings disadvantage was apparent: 25% of women were in the bottom quartile band compared with 19% of men. There was some gender convergence in Band 2, with 23% of women compared to 20% of men, but divergence in Band 3, with only 19% of women but 31% of men. The two roughly equalised at the top with 23% of women and 24% of men.

Using self-definition on full-time and part-time work, of the 90 part-time women workers for whom hourly pay data was available, 57% were in the bottom quartile, 32% in the next to bottom, but only 7% in the second to top and 3% in the top quartile. Put another way, women comprised 85% of part-time workers in the bottom quartile and 78% in the second one. The concentration of low pay here is in keeping with widespread research on the disadvantage of part-time women workers.⁹

White workers were slightly under-represented in the third and top pay quartile (89% of each) and over-represented in the bottom one (92%) and the second quartile (94%). Non-White workers were slightly over-represented in the top two quartiles (11% in each) and under-represented in the bottom band (8%) and the second (6%).

Union background

⁹ Women were 78% of part time workers in employment in 2004 (Labour Force Survey Historical Supplement, no date). After the release of New Earnings Survey Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) figures in 2005, the Equal Opportunities Commission noted that part-time women workers earned almost 40% less than full-time men. <http://www.eoc.org.uk/Default.aspx?page=17988&lang=en>, accessed 15 March 2006.

Union background referred to the job during which a problem was experienced and 'never members' comprised the majority (58%), with 34% having been members at some time. Just 6% were members at the time of the problem and were unrepresented in having no union recognition or representation. There were some gender differences: although membership during the problem was similar (6% male, 7% female), 38% of men compared with 32% of women had been members previously, and fewer men were 'never-membership' (55%) than women (60%). Over three-quarters of workers under 40 years were 'never members' (77%) and young workers below 22 years were more than twice as likely to have never been in a union than those over 40 years (94% compared to 40%). 'Never-members' were also over-represented in the bottom pay quartile (69% of this band compared with 58% of the sample) while previous members were more likely to be in the top two pay bands (38% of each compared to the average 34% representation). Previous members were also more likely to work in companies working for the public sector (43% compared with the 34% average), which suggests they may have been former public sector workers whose jobs had been privatised. Public sector workers were both more likely to be current union members (17%) and previous ones (38%) – and the highest percentage of previous members was in the voluntary sector (46%). Our findings on 'never-membership' by gender, age, pay and sector are consistent with findings from British Social Attitudes surveys going back to 1983 (Bryson and Gomez, 2005:76).

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