

Working Paper 3

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

The Unrepresented Worker Survey 2004

Mapping the Problems

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Abstract

The majority of workers in the UK are unorganised. There has been a steady decline in union membership among those in employment from 29% in 1995 to 26.2% in 2005 and among employees, from 32.6% to 29% (DTI, 2006). Approximately 70% of employees are not unionised, and two thirds have no collective bargaining coverage. Yet very little is known about how this majority of workers experience work, or deal with problems. The ESRC Project, *The Unorganised Worker, Problems at Work, Routes to Support and Views on Representation*, provides the first survey-based study of how non-unionised workers deal with problems at work. This was achieved by a telephone survey of a sample of 500 workers who were currently employed, or had been at some time in the past three years; were not unionised; earned at or below the median wage in their region and had experienced a problem at work. Previous Working Papers 1 and 2 discuss technical, methodological and conceptual issues and describe the sample. This Working Paper addresses the types of problems experienced by unrepresented workers *in any job* during the three-years previous to the survey and, in greater detail, in *one screened job*.

Background

This telephone survey of unrepresented workers' problems at work was conducted by IFF over a six-week period from October to November 2004 on a sample of 500 workers who were currently employed, or had been at some time in the past three years; were unrepresented, earned at or below the median wage in their region and had problems or a problem at work.

The problems

The definition of 'problems', addressed in greater detail in *Review of Theoretical and Methodological Issues*, Working Paper 2, required careful testing and application. The *screening* question asked whether a respondent

had experienced a *difficulty, concern or worry* in the past three years. Certain questions had prompts, and even for questions without prompts for the interviewee, there were often guidelines for the interviewer and close quality control, to eliminate trivial problems where this was a risk. Pay was narrowed to issues associated with possible breaches of rights, such as 'not being paid the correct amount, not being paid regularly, or not receiving pay for holidays or overtime', so as to screen out general dissatisfaction with pay levels. In addition, the pilot survey, which used a broad definition of 'insecurity', found a much higher response for this problem than for others, which suggested it had picked up a generalised malaise about labour market conditions, rather than problems with one job. The final questionnaire used prompts to clarify a more immediate threat, such as insecurity because of unfair treatment, being forced to quit or threatened with imminent redundancy or unfair dismissal.

In all, ten problems were explored, and after cognitive testing and piloting, were asked in the following order:

1. .Pay, such as not being paid the correct amount, not being paid regularly, or not receiving pay for holidays or overtime, etc.
2. Job Security, such as fear of unfair dismissal or being forced to quit
3. Opportunities
4. Discrimination towards yourself
5. Taking time-off
6. Working hours
7. Workload
8. Health and Safety
9. Concerns relating to your contract or job description
10. Work relations, such as stress or bullying
11. None of the above

For exploring the problems further, the questionnaire narrowed to *one job* and subdivided the problem categories, thereby clarifying them. In practice, some overlaps were likely. For example, problems with holidays could be addressed within different questions: whether or not pay was given for holidays appeared in the question on pay, while problems with time-off for holidays would be in the question on time-off. Details are available in the questionnaire itself.

The problems at work were explored at 3 levels:

1. All problems experienced over the past 3 years in any job.
2. All problems experienced in *one* job, the screened job.
3. *One* problem in the screened job, which was explored in terms of possible advice and action taken.

Problems over three years

The most frequently cited problem was pay related (almost two-fifths). Next came work-relations, such as stress and bullying (36.7 per cent), workload (31.9 per cent) job security (30.3 per cent) and working hours (28.5 per cent) (Table 1).

Table 1: Problems experienced in any job in last 3 years - ranked order

	NumberPercent	
	Yes	Yes
1. Pay (1)	191	38.1
2. Work relations, such as stress or bullying	184	36.7
3. Workload	160	31.9
4. Job Security	152	30.3
5. Working hours	143	28.5
6. Contract or job description	133	26.5
7. Health and Safety	122	24.4
8. Opportunities	121	24.2
9. Taking time-off	120	24.0
10. Discrimination (2)	89	17.8

Notes:

(1) Such as not being paid the correct amount, not being paid regularly, or not receiving pay for holidays or overtime etc

(2) Towards yourself.

Almost a quarter cited problems with contracts or job descriptions, job opportunities, health and safety and taking time-off. The smallest category was discrimination, which comprised 17.8 per cent of problems experienced.

Overlap of problems

Nobody in our sample experienced only one problem. Table 2 illustrates overlaps, with problems ranked as in Table 1. Generally, overlaps are fairly evenly spread. Between a quarter and a third of any of the ten problem groups also experienced each of the other of the ten problems. In many cases the overlap is even greater, with the overlap approaching half in some cases, such as workload and stress; job security, stress and pay problems; working hours, pay and workload; contract problems and job security; health and safety and stress; job opportunities and job security; difficulty with taking time off, working hours and stress; and discrimination and stress (57 per cent overlap), job security and pay.

Table 2: Overlap of Problems over 3 Years, in rank order of problem occurrence

		Pay	Job Opportu	Discrimi	Time-off	Working	Work Health&Contract	Stress			
		Security	nities	nation	Hours	Load	Safety				
Pay	N=	191	71	46	44	51	71	62	49	57	58
	Row (%)	100.0	37.2	24.1	23.0	26.7	37.2	32.5	25.7	29.8	30.4
Stress	N=	58	69	47	51	55	60	73	59	58	184
	Row (%)	31.5	37.5	25.5	27.7	29.9	32.6	39.7	32.1	31.5	100.0
Work Load	N=	62	49	52	31	54	67	160	48	54	73
	Row (%)	38.8	30.6	32.5	19.4	33.8	41.9	100.0	30.0	33.8	45.6
Job security	N=	71	152	58	47	45	59	49	50	50	69
	Row (%)	46.7	100.0	38.2	30.9	29.6	38.8	32.2	32.9	32.9	45.4
Working hours	N=	71	59	42	30	59	143	67	49	60	60
	Row (%)	49.7	41.3	29.4	21.0	41.3	100.0	46.9	34.3	42.0	42.0
Contract	N=	57	64	51	35	44	60	54	42	133	58
	Row (%)	42.9	48.1	38.3	26.3	33.1	45.1	40.6	31.6	100.0	43.6
Health&Safety	N=	49	50	38	27	37	49	48	122	42	59
	Row (%)	40.2	41.0	31.1	22.1	30.3	40.2	39.3	100.0	34.4	48.4
Opportu nities	N=	46	58	121	32	35	42	52	38	51	47
	Row (%)	38.0	47.9	100.0	26.4	28.9	34.7	43.0	31.4	42.1	38.8
Time-off	N=	51	45	35	31	120	59	54	37	44	55
	Row (%)	42.5	37.5	29.2	25.8	100.0	49.2	45.0	30.8	36.7	45.8
Discrimi nation	N=	44	47	32	89	31	30	31	27	35	51
	Row (%)	49.4	52.8	36.0	100.0	34.8	33.7	34.8	30.3	39.3	57.3

Table 2 illustrates that all workers experienced multiple problems, with pay, working hours and contractual problems being associated with the greatest number of other problems.

1. **Pay (38 per cent of sample and largest group).** *A third or more* also experienced problems of:
 - job security (37 per cent)
 - working hours (37 per cent),
 - work load (33 per cent)
 - Stress/work-relations (30 per cent)
 - Job description or contract problems (30 per cent).
2. **Work-relations and stress (37 per cent and second largest group),** also experienced problems of:
 - Work load (40 per cent).
 - Job security (38 per cent)
3. **Work-load problems (32 per cent and third largest group)** also experienced problems of:
 - Stress (46 per cent)
 - Problems with working hours (42 per cent)
 - Pay difficulties (39 per cent)
4. **Job security concerns (30 per cent of the sample)** also experienced problems of:
 - Stress (45 per cent)
 - Pay problems (47 per cent).
5. **Working Hours (29 per cent of sample)** also experienced problems of:
 - Pay (50 per cent).
 - Workload (47 per cent)
 - Stress (42 per cent)
 - Contract (42 per cent)
 - Security (41 per cent)
 - Health and safety (34 per cent).
6. **Contract Problems (27 per cent of sample)** also experienced problems of:
 - Job security (48 per cent)
 - Working hours (45 per cent)
 - Stress (44 per cent)
 - Pay (43 per cent)
 - Workload (41 per cent).
 - Job opportunities (38 per cent)
 - Time off (33 per cent)
7. **Health and Safety (24.4 per cent of sample)** also experienced problems of:
 - Stress (48 per cent)
 - Job security (41 per cent)

- Working hours (40 per cent)
 - Pay (40 per cent)
- 8. Job opportunities (24 per cent of the sample)** also experienced problems of:
- Job security (48 per cent)
 - Workload (43 per cent)
 - Contract 42 per cent)
- 9. Difficulty with taking time off (24 per cent of the sample)** also experienced problems of:
- Working hours (49 per cent)
 - Stress (46 per cent)
 - Workload (45 per cent)
 - Pay (43 per cent)
- 10. Discrimination (17.8 per cent of the sample)** also experienced problems of:
- Stress (57 per cent)
 - Job security (53 per cent)
 - Pay (49 per cent).

Problems in one job

Following the mapping of the problems experienced over the past three years, respondents were asked to focus on the problems in *one* job. Multiple answers within each problem could be cited, so the totals do not add up to 100 per cent. In general, the frequency with which problems occurred were the same in the screened job as they were over 3 years, with some exceptions. In the screened job, working hours problems were slightly more important than job security – the reverse of the experience over 3 years, and taking time-off, which had been ninth in importance, had moved up to share seventh place with Health and Safety. However, as is shown in Table 3, the percentage differences were small.

Table 3: Problems experienced in one job rank order and compared with problems over 3 years

	Number in 1 job	% in One Job	% in 3 years Yes	Rank order for job	Rank order for 3 years
1 Pay (1)	181	36.1	(38.1)	1	1
2. Work relations, such as stress or bullying	172	34.3	(36.7)	2	2
3. Workload	143	28.5	(31.9)	3	3
4 Working hours	127	25.3	(28.5)	4	5
5. Job Security	124	24.8	(30.3)	5	4
6. Contract/job description	114	22.8	(26.5)	6	6
7. Health and Safety	109	21.8	(24.4)	7	7
7. Taking time-off	109	21.8	(24.0)	7	9
8. Opportunities	102	20.4	(24.2)	8	8
9. Discrimination	76	15.2	(17.8)	9	10

Details of problems in one job

1. Pay problems (38 per cent over 3 years; 36 per cent or 181 workers in one job).

Table 4: Pay Problem by types

	N=	Percent
Pay being less than what others in your type of job earn	75	41.4
It not being clear how the amount in your pay packet had been determined	37	20.4
Pay being incorrect	75	41.4
Pay being withheld (not being paid for work done)	30	16.6
Not getting paid for overtime that you had done	49	27.1
Not getting paid for holidays	33	18.2
Not getting paid for sick days	31	17.1
Not getting paid for maternity/paternity leave	3	1.7
Pay being late	39	21.5

Two areas, 'pay being less than others in your type of job', and 'pay being incorrect', stand out as the major forms of pay problems among those with a pay problem (Table 4). Not getting paid for overtime, pay being late and being unclear about how the pay packet was determined were further important problems for 27, 21 and 20 per cent of these workers, while not getting paid holidays or sick-pay affected a further 18 and 17 per cent.

2. Work relations (37 per cent over 3 years, 34 per cent or 172 workers referring to one job).

The largest category here was stress (70 per cent), followed by 'management taking advantage or bullying' (55 per cent), with a substantial group (27 per cent) also reporting bullying by other workers.

Table 5: Work relations problems by types

	N=	Percent
Stress	121	70.3
Management taking advantage or bullying me	94	54.7
Bullying by other workers	47	27.3
Management attitude / lack of support (unprompted)	7	4.1
Workload pressure / unrealistic expectation (unprompted)	5	2.9
Attitudes and behavior of other staff / colleagues (unprompted)	4	2.3
Other	5	2.9

3. Work load (32 per cent over 3 years, 29 per cent or 143 workers referring to one job)

Table 6: Work load problem by types

	N=	Percent
You were put under pressure to perform too fast	64	44.8
You were given too much work without enough time	100	69.9
You were given tasks to do which were never agreed as part of your job	49	34.3
You were given tasks to do for which you hadn't been trained or did not have the necessary experience	46	32.2
Your pay was linked to targets and performance	18	12.6
Management took advantage of your willingness to work hard	81	56.6
There were not enough staff provided / staff shortage (unprompted)	12	8.4
You were expected to complete other people's work / take on other people's responsibilities (unprompted)	4	2.8
You were expected to work long hours (unprompted)	2	1.4
Other	7	4.9

The three largest types of workload problems were ‘too much work without enough time (70 per cent), ‘management took advantage of willingness to work hard (57 per cent) - which may be the same problem as that reported under work-relations as ‘management taking advantage or bullying – and ‘put under pressure to perform too fast’ (45 per cent).

4. Working hours (29 per cent over 3 years, 25 per cent or 127 workers referring to one job).

Table 7: Working hours problem by types

	N=	Percent
More than agreed	57	44.9
Fewer than agreed	7	5.5
Unpredictable	65	51.2
Inflexible	52	40.9
No breaks (unprompted)	2	1.8
Un/Anti-social working hours (unprompted)	3	2.4
Long hours/overtime (unprompted)	6	4.7
Difficulties managing/completing workload in working hours (unprompted)	4	3.1
Increased working hours but no pay increase/pay not a reflection of hours worked (unprompted)	4	3.1
Working hours don't account for traveling time / distance (unprompted)	3	2.4
Other	8	6.3

By far the most frequently cited working-hours problems were unpredictable hours, working more hours than agreed and hours being inflexible, although there were a few examples of unprompted forms too.

5. Job security problems (30 per cent over 3 years, 25 per cent or 124 workers referring to one job).

For the majority of workers with an insecurity problem (59 per cent), ‘a fear that you might lose your job (e.g. be made redundant)’ dominated.

Table 8: Job security problem by types

	N=	Percent
A worry that you might lose your job (e.g. be made redundant)	73	58.9
Being threatened unfairly with dismissal	36	29.0
Actually being dismissed or sacked	19	15.3
Being forced to quit because of changes in your job description	16	12.9
Being forced to quit because of changes in your pay	9	7.3
Uncertainty or lack of working hours / issues with contract renewal / temporary or agency staff	13	10.5
Being forced to quit because of work colleagues / management (unprompted)	6	4.8

It should be reiterated that this question was hardened following cognitive testing, to reduce a general malaise about security, so as to focus on an identifiable period of fear or worry about or in a job. Thus job security, according to this survey, was a key form of insecurity. A second major problem, reported by almost a third within this problem area, was worry about unfair dismissal, while 15 per cent were actually unfairly dismissed.

6. Contract or job description problems (27 per cent over 3 years, 23 per cent or 114 workers referring to one job).

While just two issues dominated job security worries, there were four major areas of contract or job description problems (Table 9). The most-cited was lack of formal or written contract (44 per cent) – a high percentage, considering this is illegal after 2 month’s employment - but almost as important was being asked to do tasks which were not specified in the contract or job description (41 per cent) – a clear contribution to workplace conflict. Related difficulties, experienced by over a third, were over pay or conditions being different from those agreed in the contract, and the associated problem of the job description containing things which were not mentioned at the job interview.

Table 9: Contract/job description-related problems by types

	N=	Percent
Not being given a formal contract or written job description	50	43.9
Not getting a contract renewed	13	11.4
Being asked to undertake tasks not specified in my contract or job description	47	41.2
Pay or conditions not matching what was agreed (including working hours)	39	34.2
Things being in my contract or job description that I was not told about at the interview	32	28.1
Changes have been made to job description / contract (unprompted)	7	6.1
Disagree / unhappy with terms in contract (unprompted)	5	4.4
Contract or job description not clear or specific enough (unprompted)	3	2.6
Other	3	2.6
Don't know	1	.9

There thus seems a high degree of employer failure to provide a written agreement, or non-compliance with one.

7. Health and safety problems (24 per cent over 3 years, 22 per cent or 109 workers referring to one job).

Table 10: Health and Safety Problem by Types

	N=	Percent
Managerial negligence	53	48.6
Being asked to do unsafe or dangerous jobs or tasks	46	42.2
The work environment in general was unsafe or dangerous	59	54.1
There was inadequate health and safety training	55	50.5
Poor / faulty / inadequate equipment provided (unprompted)	9	8.3
Poor / insufficient facilities (unprompted)	5	4.6
Working unsupervised / being left alone (unprompted)	2	1.8
Dealing with aggressive customers / don't feel safe (unprompted)	1	.9
Other	3	2.8

In the area of Health and Safety, strikingly high percentages of the respondents cited all four forms of this problem (Table 10), around half agreeing that the working environment was unsafe or dangerous, that there was inadequate health and safety training, and that there was managerial negligence, and a further 42 per cent saying they were asked to do unsafe or dangerous tasks. A further 8 per cent added the unprompted problems of

being provided with poor, faulty or inadequate equipment. It is worth pointing out that, over 3 years, over 40 per cent of those with health and safety problems also had problems with pay, job security, working hours, and 48 per cent with work relations/stress.

8. Problems with taking time off (24 per cent over 3 years, 22 per cent or 109 workers referring to one job).

Table 11: Time-off problem by types

	N=	Percent
Holiday	50	45.9
Sickness	48	44.0
Maternity or paternity leave	4	3.7
Taking care of family members or relatives	27	24.8
Training	10	9.2
Medical (doctor / dentist / hospital) appointments (unprompted)	6	5.5
Bereavement (unprompted)	3	2.8
Other personal reasons (unprompted)	7	6.4
Other	0	0.0

Taking time off was as important to the respondents as health and safety, and two issues dominated this area (Table 11): holidays (for 46 per cent) and sickness (for 44 per cent). A further quarter also had problems taking time off for family issues.

9. Opportunities problems (24 per cent over 3 years, 20 per cent or 102 workers referring to one job).

Table 12: Opportunities problem by types

	N=	Percent
Limited opportunities for job progression or promotion	86	84.3
Limited opportunities for training to help me do the job better	54	52.9
Limited opportunities for training to help develop my career	63	61.8
Opportunity for progression/training only available to certain employees (unprompted)	5	4.9
Other	6	5.9

Opportunities problems, slightly less likely to be raised in the screened job than when 3 years were considered, were still reported by a fifth of the sample. This problem displayed the greatest concentration in *one* form: that of

'limited opportunities for job progression or promotion', reported by 84 per cent of this group (Table 12). Almost two thirds also cited limited training opportunities to help develop a career, and over half, problems with training opportunities to help do a better job.

10. Discrimination problems (18per cent over 3 years, 15 per cent or 76 workers referring to one job).

Two findings stand out in this problem area: one is its generally low reportage, and second is the order of importance of types of discrimination, with age the foremost (28 per cent), followed by sex discrimination (20 per cent), disability (11 per cent), race (8 per cent) and religious discrimination (3 per cent). Thus, it seems that a perception of discrimination may not be related to its legal status – at the time of research, although age discrimination is to be outlawed under the EU Framework Directive, at present there is only a voluntary code of practice, and the government has until 2006 to enforce this.

Table 13: Discrimination problems by types

	N=	Percent
Sex	15	19.7
Race	6	7.9
Age	21	27.6
Religion	2	2.6
Sexual orientation	0	0
Disability or learning difficulty	8	10.5
Being a mother / expectant mother (unprompted)	6	7.9
General victimisation / poor treatment for no reason (unprompted)	7	9.2
Personality (unprompted)	6	7.9
Health and illness (unprompted)	3	3.9
Temporary / part-time status (unprompted)	3	3.9
Favouritism / preferential treatment of others (unprompted)	4	5.3
Intelligence relating to ability to do the job (unprompted)	3	3.9
Type of role / position held in job (unprompted)	3	3.9
Relationship status outside workplace (unprompted)	2	2.6
Other	3	3.9

Also striking is the large number of unprompted additions, some in relatively large numbers. Thus, discrimination on grounds of being a mother, or being pregnant (both illegal under sex discrimination law, although not reported as such in this survey, indicating lack of knowledge of rights) is as high as race discrimination. Other quite frequent forms of ‘discrimination’ are more correctly defined as victimisation and include ‘general victimisations’ (9 per cent) and ‘personality’ (8 per cent).

Summarising major specific (details of) problems

While Table 3 demonstrates the ranking of problems identified among respondents in *one job*, and Tables 4-13 show how *specific* problems rank within each area, this review of problems at work of unrepresented workers concludes by highlighting which *specific problems*, overall, were reported as the main ones (Table 14).

Table 14: Major specific problems across whole sample, screened job

Main Problem Area	Specific Problem	N=	Percent of Whole Sample
Work Relation	Stress	121	24.1%
	Management taking advantage or bullying me	94	18.8%
Work Load	You were given too much work without enough time	100	20.0%
	Management took advantage of your willingness to work hard	81	16.1%
Opportunities	You were put under pressure to perform too fast	64	12.8%
	Limited opportunities for job progression or promotion	86	17.2%
	Limited opportunities for training to help develop my career	63	12.6%
Pay	Pay being less than what others in your type of job earn	75	15.0%
	Pay being incorrect	75	15.0%
Job Security	A worry that you might lose your job (e.g. be made redundant)	73	14.6%
Working Hours	Unpredictable	65	13.0%
	More than agreed	57	11.4%
	Inflexible	52	10.4%
Health and Safety	The work environment in general was unsafe or dangerous	59	11.8%
	There was inadequate health and safety training	55	11.0%
	Managerial negligence	53	10.6%
Contract/Job Description	Not being given a formal contract or written job description	50	10.0%

As a rough benchmark, where 50 or more workers (10 per cent of the whole survey sample and above) reported a *specific* problem, this is regarded as substantial. Stress, being given too much work without enough time and management 'taking advantage' are the most prevalent problems recalled in a job among lower paid, unrepresented workers, while opportunities, pay being less than others in a similar job, or being incorrect and a worry about being made redundant are further major areas. Unpredictable and inflexible hours, working more than agreed, unsafe working, inadequate health and safety training and management negligence are also perceived as problems by substantial numbers, while not being given a formal or written job contract is reported by a tenth of the sample.

Infringement of rights

Of further interest in terms of *perceptions* of these problems, is whether respondents regarded them as 'an infringement of rights'. This question explores whether people regard a problem as an infringement in a *legal* sense, although it may also include a broader question of *rights* in terms of fairness and legitimacy – a dimension of the Government's employment policy, as expressed in, for example, in reference to 'fair treatment of employees' in its White Paper 'Fairness at Work' (DTI, 1998: 1.9). In total, 278 people thought that some of their problems were an infringement of their rights (55%) and 45% did not. Table 15 below shows those people who thought their problem an infringement of their rights as a percentage of those who experienced that problem. This shows that the highest percentages *within each problem area* of those who regarded their problems as an infringement of their rights were among those with discrimination, health and safety, pay, work relations and working hours problems, and the lowest among those with opportunities and job security problems.

Table 15 Infringement of rights

Problem	Total in Problem Area	Total who believe this Problem 'infringement of Rights	Percent of those with that Problem who felt it was an Infringement of Rights
	Total	501	278
Pay	181	85	47.0
Work relations, such as stress or bullying	172	81	47.0
Workload	143	55	38.5
Working hours	127	60	47.2
Job Security	124	40	32.3
Contract or job description	114	50	44.0
Health and Safety	109	55	50.5
Taking time-off	109	45	41.3
Opportunities	102	25	24.5
Discrimination	76	41	54.0

Further analysis will be conducted to identify what the problems were, to identify the relationship between a sense of infringement and whether action was taken. Qualitative interviews are also required to probe the meaning of this question in the diverse problem areas, since responses are likely to conflate knowledge of employment rights (Meager et al, 2002) with broader expectations of fair treatment.

Concluding Remarks

Working Paper 3 is a first attempt to map the experiences of problems among 'unrepresented workers'. Further analysis will examine which were the *main* problems focused upon in the screened job, in terms of subsequent actions, and the wider routes to support taken, as well as views on support, of this sample of lower paid, unrepresented workers.

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