



The job quality of key worker employees: Analysis of the Labour Force Survey

Working paper (Available to download here <https://openaccess.city.ac.uk/id/eprint/24254/>)

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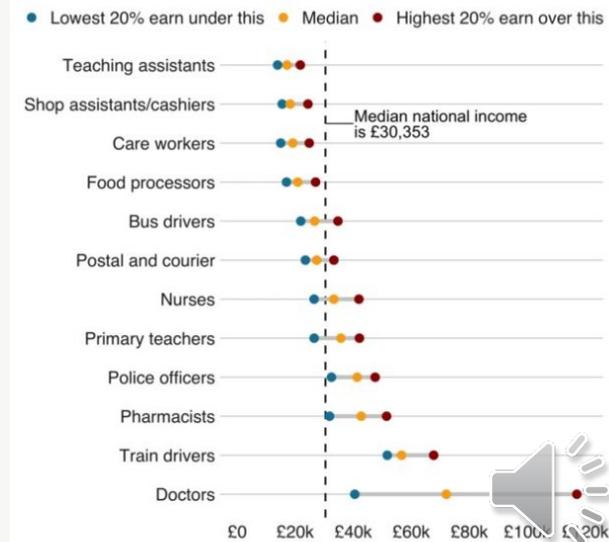


Key workers and the pandemic

- **Key workers** critical to running the country during pandemic
- **Challenging** work conditions e.g. health and mortality risks of frontline workers (Kikuchi and Khurana, [2020](#); ONS, [2020](#))
- Led to discussions of how much society **values** key workers more generally, with a focus on **pay**
 - Many key workers **paid less** than the average employee (Butcher, [2020](#); Farquharson et al, [2020](#))
 - With certain **groups** of key workers disproportionately earning less - women, ethnic minorities, lower educational qualifications (Cominetti et al, [2020](#))

How much do 'key workers' earn?

Lowest and highest brackets of income for full-time employees
Salary in £ thousands





Aims of our research

- Missing from debate is broader understanding of the usual **'job quality'** of key workers - security of work, work patterns, progression opportunities etc
- We illustrate the job quality of selected key worker occupations by analysing data from the **Labour Force Survey**
- Can we produce a relatively quick, but robust, analysis to contribute to the current **debate** about valuing key worker jobs?

We explore:

- What is the **job quality** of (selected) key workers occupations and how does it compare to that of the **average** employee?
- How does job quality sit with **pay**?
- Which key worker occupations have the **lowest** job quality and lowest pay?



DATA AND DEFINITIONS



Data and definitions



- Labour Force Survey
 - Key source of **labour market** statistics in the UK
 - Government funded **representative survey** takes place every quarter year
 - **Questions** on employment, unemployment, economic inactivity and personal characteristics
 - Some questions asked every **quarter**, others less regularly
 - Nearly **90,000** adult respondents per survey
- Our analysis of the LFS
 - We pool data from **2016-2019** to increase sample size
 - This allows us to look at specific occupations
 - We pool quarters of data from new entrants into the LFS
 - We do that for three separate years (Q1-Q4 2019, Q1-Q4 2018, Q1-Q4 2017, Q1-Q4 2016)
 - Some variables are just in one quarter, so we pool just those quarters going back four years
 - **So we capture ‘usual’ job quality, before the pandemic**



Job quality

- Difficult to **precisely** define
- Multiple **aspects**, and multiple indicators could be used to capture each
- Government has been recommended **‘Good work’** indicators – LFS has questions in a number of these dimensions
- We use nine indicators of **negative job quality**
 - **plus pay** (from Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings)



Job quality measures (1)

1. Working long hours (measured for full-time employees)

Q. How many hours per week do you usually work in your (main) job/business – please exclude meal breaks?, and, How many hours paid/unpaid overtime do you usually work per week?

2. Working evenings and nights

Q. Within your usual pattern of work is it usual for you to work in the evening, or at night?

3. Working at the weekend

Q. On how many (different) days per week do you usually work?, May I just check, on which days do you usually work?

4. Shift work

Q. Do you do shift work in your job?



Job quality measures (2)

5. Not having a permanent job

Q. Is your job... a permanent job, or is there some way that it is not permanent?

6. Having a zero-hours contract

Q. Some people have special working hours arrangements that vary daily or weekly. In your (main) job is your agreed working arrangement any of the following...zero hours contract?

7. Suffering from an illness or disability caused by work

Q. Within the last twelve months have you suffered from any illness, disability or other physical or mental problem that was caused or made worse by your job or by work you have done in the past?



Job quality measures (3)

8. Not being offered training or education by the employer

Q. In the last 3 months, has your (previous or current) employer offered you any training or education either on, or away from, your job?

9. Pay and conditions not influenced by trade union

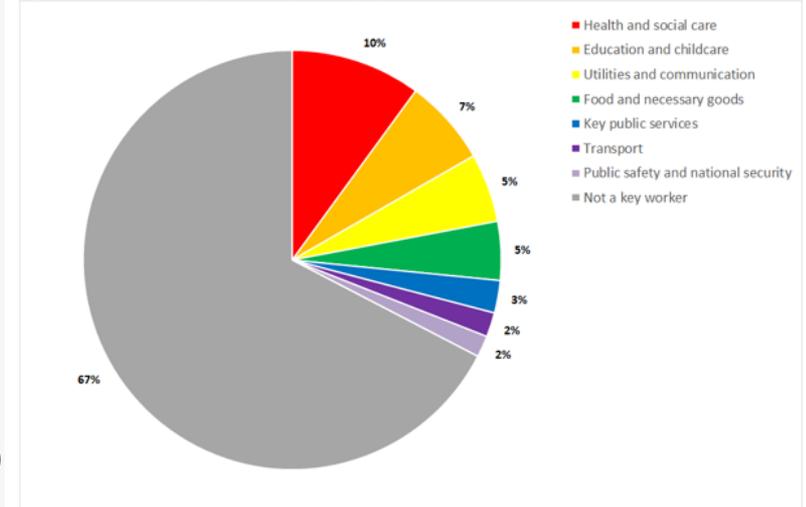
Q. Are your pay and conditions of employment directly affected by agreements between your employer and any trade union or staff association?



Key workers

- Government definition of those whose work is **critical** to the Covid-19 response (Cabinet Office, [2020](#); Farquharson et al, [2020](#))
- These occupations can be identified in the LFS using a 4-digit **Standard Occupational Classification** e.g. medical practitioners (SOC code 2211), nurses (SOC code 2231)
- Approximately **1/3** of the workforce are key workers
- The vast majority are **employees** (we focus only on employees)
- We focus on some selected key worker **occupations**:
 - Health: Medical practitioners, Nurses, Care workers, and Cleaners
 - Education: Primary school teachers, Teaching assistants, Social workers, and Nursery nurses
 - Utilities: Postal workers
 - Food: Checkout staff, and Food and drink process operatives
 - Public services: Welfare and housing advisors
 - Transport: Large goods vehicle drivers, Bus drivers
 - Public safety: Police officers, and Security guards
- Chose as interesting, mainly frontline occupations - and big sample size
 - **Sample size** of occupations varies from ~350 (social workers) to ~2,650 (care workers)

Figure 1: Proportion of key workers by sector, people in work



Source: McSweeney ([2020](#)), data from 2019 Labour Force Survey / Annual Population Survey



FINDINGS



Radar charts represent job quality

All employees

£30,353 gross annual pay

6% do not have a permanent job

74% have not used a trade union to negotiate pay and conditions

4% suffered illness or disability caused by job in last year

3% have a zero hours working arrangement

66% not been offered training or education in last 3 months

16% usually work Saturdays and Sundays

40 hours worked per week including overtime

28% regularly work evenings or nights

17% regularly do shift work

Characteristics:

- 49% female
- 29% 50+yrs
- 12% ethnic minority
- 37% with children
- 34% degree educated



Nurses

£33,242 gross annual pay

3% do not have a permanent job

41% have not used a trade union to negotiate pay and conditions

7% suffered illness or disability caused by job in last year

2% have a zero hours working arrangement

40% not been offered training or education in last 3 months

38% usually work Saturdays and Sundays

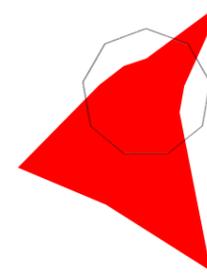
38 hours worked per week including overtime

51% regularly work evenings or nights

50% regularly do shift work

Characteristics:

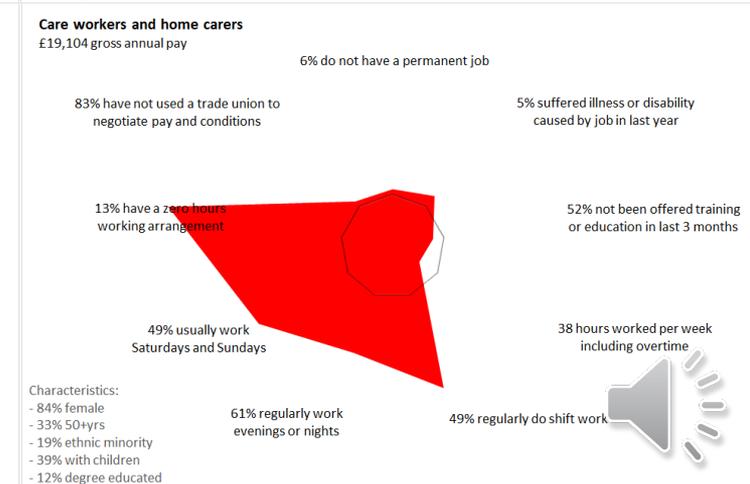
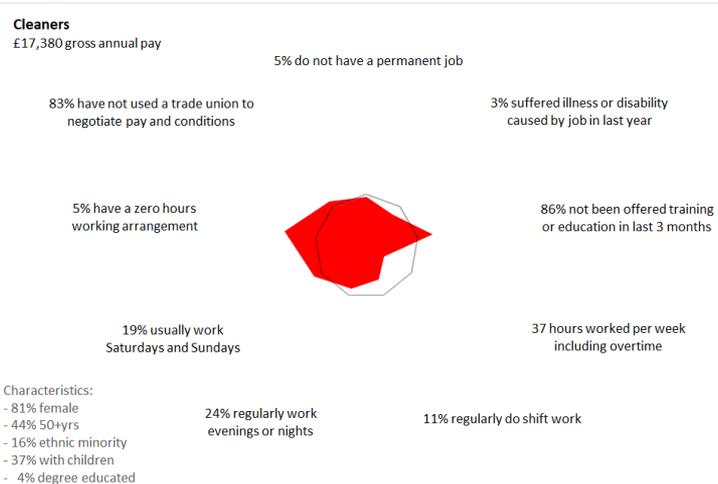
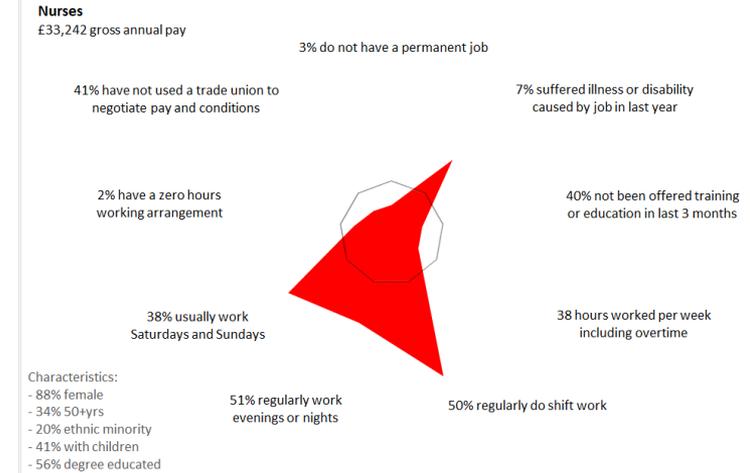
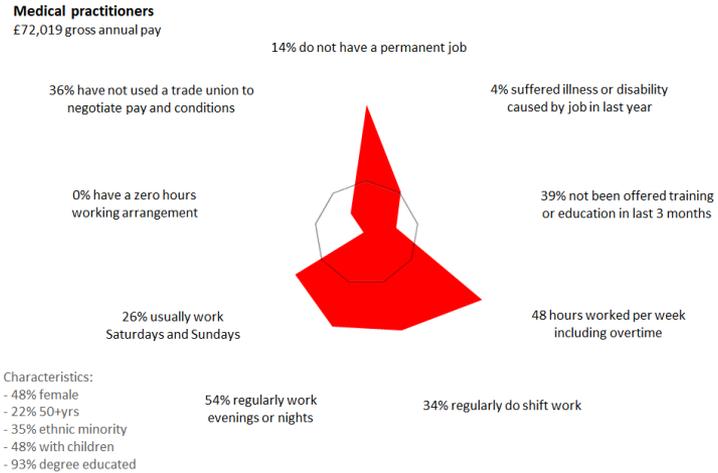
- 88% female
- 34% 50+yrs
- 20% ethnic minority
- 41% with children
- 56% degree educated



- Black nonagon represents the average employee
- 6% of employees do not have a permanent job etc.
- 49% of employees are female etc.
- Charts calculated for each key worker occupation
- Chart outside nonagon indicates lower job quality
- e.g. nurses more likely to suffer illness, work shifts, evening/nights, and weekends

Variation in job quality within sectors

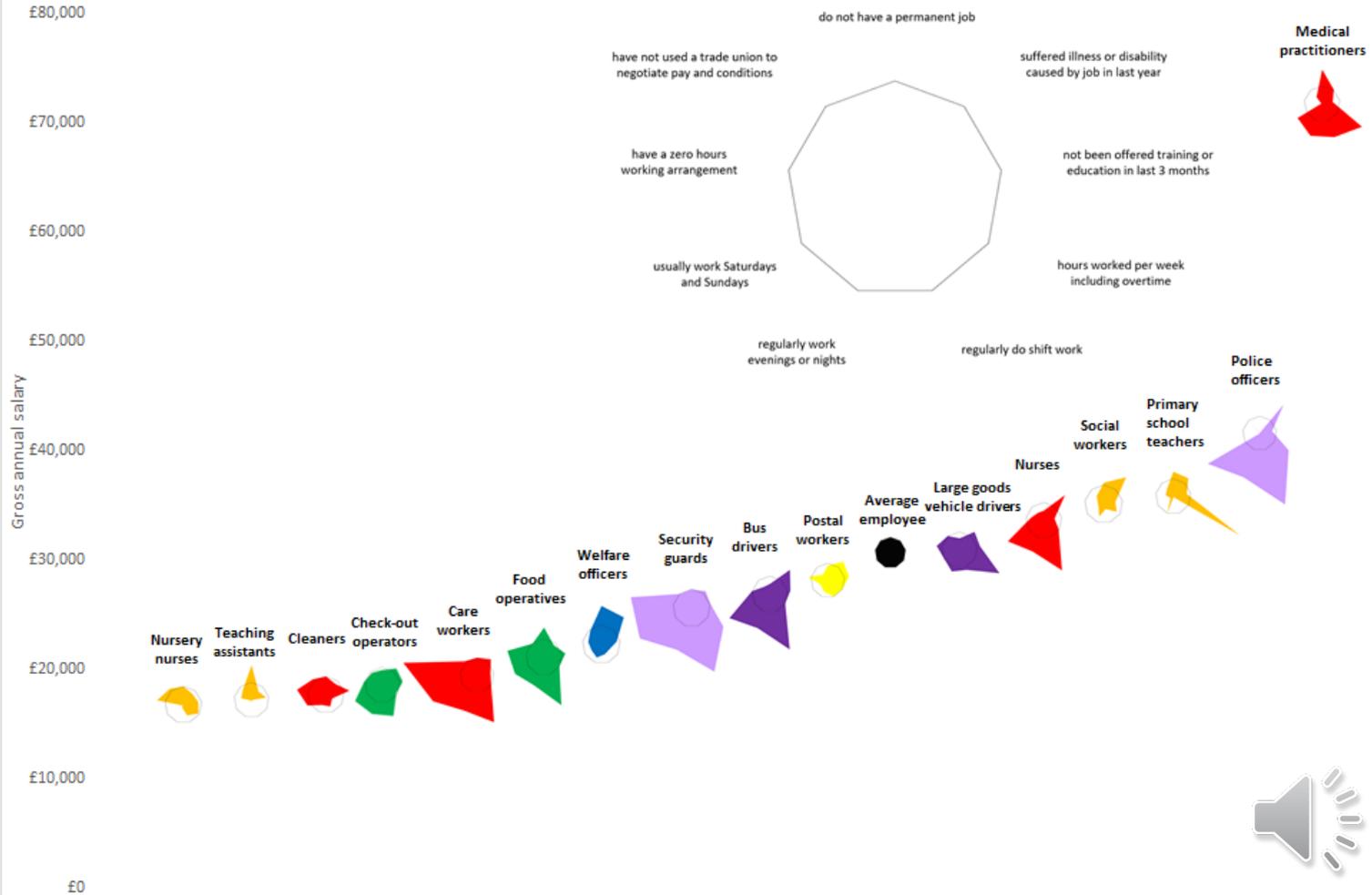
- Within health sector, for example, variation in pay and job quality
- Care workers on low pay and lower job quality
- Care workers disproportionately women, ethnic minorities, and lower education
- Pay associated with educational qualifications



Job quality and pay

Many key workers not only receive low pay but also experience lower job quality than the average employee, notably:

- Care workers
- Food operatives
- Security guards
- Bus drivers



SUMMARY AND NEXT STEPS



Summary findings

- **Variations** in pay and job quality
- Key workers and **'anti-social' hours**
 - Reflection of some occupations
 - Repercussions for health, sleep, social contact
- Some occupations fare markedly **worse** than others
- **Socio-demographic divisions**
 - Gender
 - Ethnic minorities



Limitations and next steps

- **Limitations** of this (quickly produced) research
 - Limited range of job quality indicators and occupations
 - Some indicators correlated
- **Next steps**
 - Annual Population Survey has more indicators of job quality
 - 'Good Work' measure/index
 - Sector level analysis (using ONS definition)
 - Compare keyworkers' job quality, and wellbeing, in the pandemic
- Explore socio-demographic/economic **inequalities** in more depth
 - Gender, Ethnicity, Class
- Explore duration and changes in quality of work (Nhlanhla's PhD)



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