

OPEN all HOURS

'Work-rich' or 'work-poor'?

The UK can be divided into relatively 'work-rich' and 'work-poor' areas. In the former, the people who are in work are more likely to be working very long hours, which may affect their well-being. In the latter areas, where unemployment is higher, those in work are less likely to be working long hours and many people do not work at all. This geography of work matters not only because *not* being in work is known to have adverse effects on people, but also because working long hours can be associated with worse health, lower productivity and difficulties balancing the demands of home and work. While some jobs associated with long hours need to be located in particular parts of the country (agriculture, for example), many others could be more evenly distributed across the UK, making the demand for labour more even. This would help reduce the stark differences between the lives of the 'work-rich' and the 'work-poor'.

Employment, unemployment and working hours

Although the UK has not quite reached full employment, as pledged by Gordon Brown in 1999, unemployment is markedly lower today than in recent years. Getting people into work has been a cornerstone of the Labour government's approach to tackling poverty and other wider societal ills. Perhaps because so many more of us are in work, concern is turning towards issues of 'work-life balance'. Concern has grown that many of us are working too many hours in a week and that this might be damaging our physical and mental health and family life. Opinions differ as to what 'long hours' actually means, but typically working more than 48 hours a week is thought to constitute 'too much'. The government brought in Working Time Regulations (WTR) on 1 October 1998, which say



Life in Britain

The latest Census reveals that within the UK people live in very different worlds. For some, resources and amenities abound; for others life is characterised by deprivation and difficulties, especially when their need for support is great.

The 2001 Census marked the bi-centenary of census taking in the UK. It is the most comprehensive social record of life in this country now available. Since 1801 successive governments have asked the population to assist in the taking of a Census.

This report is one of a series of 10 showing key patterns and inequalities in life in the UK revealed by the 2001 Census. These reports focus on geographical inequalities, highlighting where services and opportunities appear not to be available or accessible to those people and places that need them most.

that workers cannot be forced to work for more than 48 hours a week on average.

Despite more people being in employment, unemployment is still a feature of contemporary UK. A little less than 5% of the working-age population was unemployed in the summer of 2004¹. There are now, for the first time, two groups of people for whom work might be considered a particular problem – those who cannot get a job, and those who spend too much time doing the job they have. One obvious question is whether people who are working very long hours could conceivably work less by letting other people who are not in work share the load, but this depends on where the over-worked and unemployed, and their jobs, are located, and the work that people do.

In this report, data from the 2001 Census are used to explore and compare these two groups. The 2001 Census asked every individual about their employment status (that is to say, whether they were working or not), and also asked them to state the number of hours that they worked. The actual question asked was as follows, and unfortunately only relates to a person's main job:

How many hours a week do you usually work in your main job?

- **Answer to the nearest whole hour**
- **Give average for last four weeks.**

For this analysis, data from the Census were used to calculate the number of people who were unemployed, along with the number of people working long hours (counted as those working more than 48 hours a week). Because of the way that the Census asks about working hours, the long hours group does not include people who do 49 or more hours spread over more than one job, which means people who have two or even three jobs are not included in this group although they ought to be. The analysis was restricted to people aged between 30 and 54. This is because it can be hard to tell the employment status and circumstances of many people in younger and older age groups. They can be students, or semi-retired, and including them may confuse the picture. Although the Census does not, in this case, represent a perfect picture of working life in the UK, it does at least give some indication about whether, and for how long during

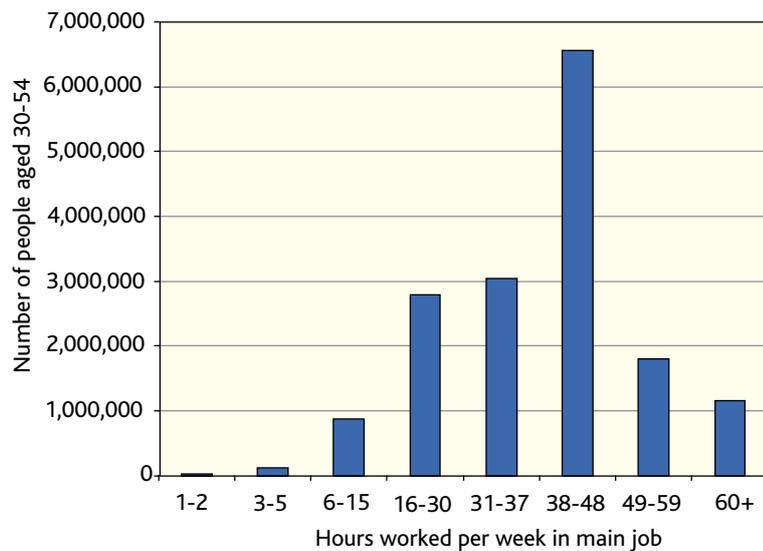
the day or night, people are working, rather than adhering to complex government definitions of work and working hours.

As for the other reports in this series, the UK was divided into 142 areas: counties, unitary authorities and former metropolitan authorities. The distributions of the unemployed and those working long hours across these areas of the country can then be compared. The report asks this question:

In areas where there is a higher level of unemployment, do the people who are working tend to be working long hours?

Findings

The 2001 Census revealed that 2.95 million people aged 30-54 worked for 49 or more hours a week. This equates to 18% of the working population in that age group in the UK. Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of working hours among people in this age group, showing that most employed people work between 31 and 48 hours per week that equates to a typical 'full-time job'. Those working 30 hours per week or less are classified as working part time by the Census. Part-time employees are more likely to be women – 79% of those employed part time were women, as opposed to 35% of those working full time^{TR}. We also know that managers, professionals and operative and assembly workers are those occupations most likely to be working long hours. Among women who work long hours, two thirds are in managerial and professional occupations (23% and 40% respectively). The sectors with a particularly high incidence of long-hours working are construction, transport, communication and agriculture, forestry and fishing. The incidence of long-hours working is higher in the private sector than the public sector. The UK has a reputation as a long-hours culture. In fact, average working hours in the UK are about middle of the range across all EU member states when all employees (full-time and part-time employees) are included. However, the UK position is affected by the fact that the UK employs a high proportion of part-time women workers. Just over one fifth (22%) of UK men working full time

Figure 1: Hours worked per week for people aged 30-54, UK (2001)

work long hours compared with an average of one tenth (11%) across the other EU member states².

About 740,000 people aged 30-54 were unemployed in 2001 – 3.5% of this age group. These people are of particular concern since they are also the most likely to be unemployed on a long-term basis³.

Comparing areas

This series of reports is about comparing the 'worlds' in which people live in the UK. Figure 2 does this by illustrating the relationship between the percentage of employed people aged 30-54 who are working long hours, and the percentage of people aged 30-54 who are unemployed for the 142 areas of the UK. The figure demonstrates that there is an 'inverse' association between the two measures^{TR}. That is to say, areas where larger numbers of the working population work long hours tend also to have low unemployment rates. Figure 2 also shows some differences in this general pattern for different parts of the UK, and these are highlighted by the maps in Figures 3 and 4.

In general, unemployment is higher in the North East of England, Scotland and parts of the English West Midlands, than in southern and central UK (Figure 3). This is reflected in Figure 2 where southern England

100 years ago

Employment circumstances in 1901 were very different to those 100 years later. Most jobs were in sectors such as manufacturing, agriculture and mining, and the workforce included children. The Factory Act of 1891 had raised the minimum age at which a child could legally work from 10 to 11. However, the time around the turn of the century marked the beginning of the de-industrialisation of the UK, with substantial increases in 'white-collar' jobs. For example, the proportion of males aged 10 and over working in agriculture dropped from 24% in 1851 to 10% in 1901. Between 1891 and 1901, the proportions of men employed in telecommunications grew by 53%, in local government by 37% and working as merchants, agents and buyers by 37%.

For more information see the National Archives (www.nationalarchives.gov.uk).

Figure 2: The percentage of people working long hours versus the percentage of people who were unemployed (2001)



Notes: Each circle is a county, unitary or former metropolitan authority, drawn with the area in proportion to the total population in 2001 (the largest circle represents London, with a population of just over 7 million). Areas in northern England are those that lie west or north of the counties of Gloucestershire, Warwickshire, Leicestershire and Lincolnshire (the Severn-Humber divide).

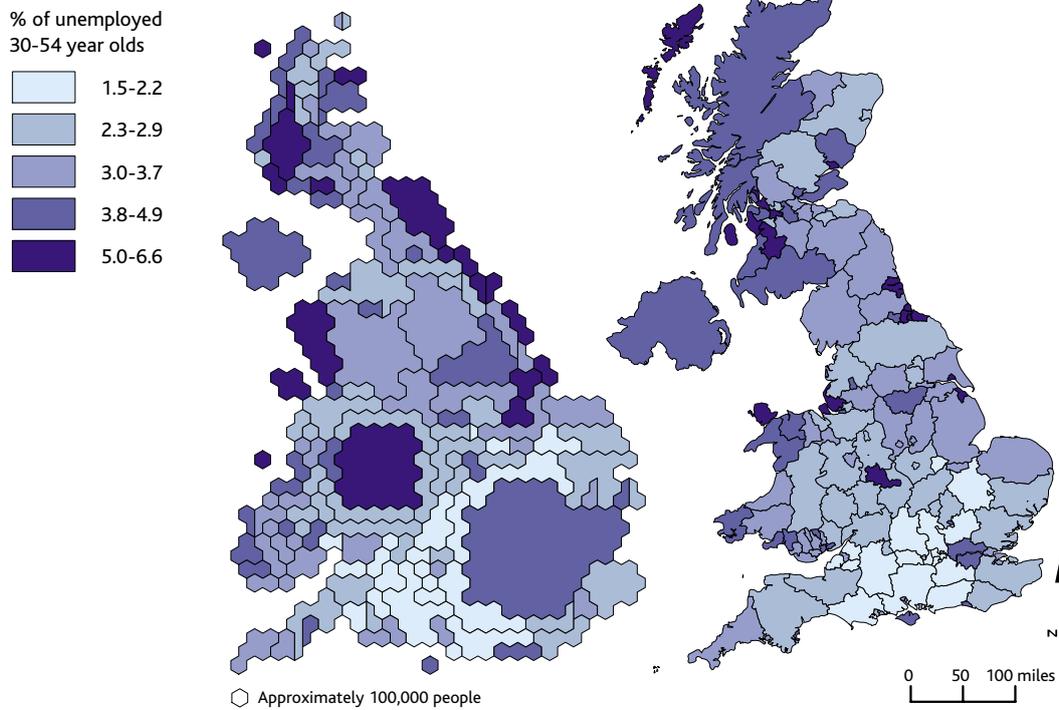
dominates the bottom right-hand end of the range of circles – denoting lower unemployment levels. The position of these circles also denotes markedly higher proportions of long working hours for employed people in the South. Not only are you more likely to be working here, but if you are working, you are more likely to be working long hours. Typically, just over one in five working people aged 30-54 and living in the South are working more hours than the government recommends. However, Figures 2 and 4 show that it is not residents of London who are dominating this long-hours group. The largest circle on Figure 2 is London and it manages to have both quite a high level of unemployment *and* quite a high level of residents working long hours. Figure 4 shows the geography of long-hours working, with a range of different types of areas showing higher levels of long-hours workers. This may reflect different occupations prevalent in different areas. The high rates in the areas around, but not in, London may be associated with commuters working long hours in well-paid jobs in the city. The high rates in mid-Wales and more rural parts of England and Scotland are more likely to be associated

with jobs in agriculture, fishing and long shift-based industries such as oil.

Since 2001

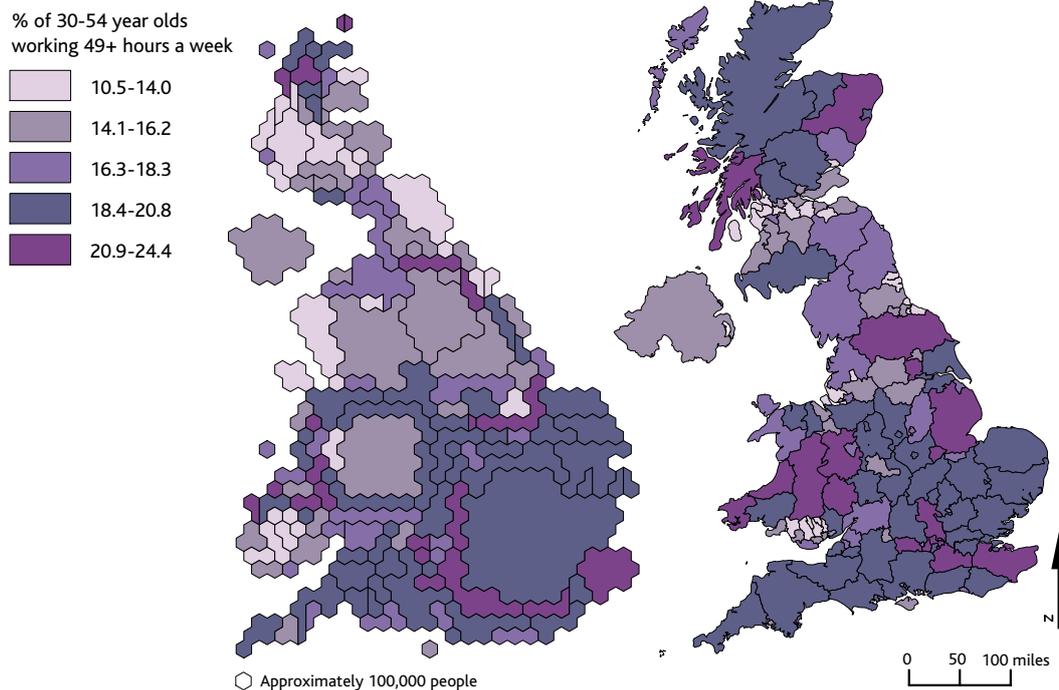
Although *The Working Time Regulations* (1998) dictate that workers cannot be forced to work for more than 48 hours a week on average, a survey in 2002 found that the proportion of people working long hours was increasing and had risen from one in eight working more than 60 hours a week in 2000, to one in six in 2002⁴. Meanwhile, the overall official unemployment rate has changed little since 2001; the seasonally adjusted rate based on the Office for National Statistics Labour Force Survey was 4.9% in 2001 and 4.8% in 2004⁵. Accompanying these developments has been an increase in the amount of attention being paid to work-life balance, with numerous government departments taking a keen interest in reducing working hours and making it easier to combine work and family life⁶.

Figure 3: Variation in unemployment rates across the 142 areas of the UK (2001)



Note: Both maps in each figure represent the same places, shaded identically. The map on the left is a cartogram – each area is shown in proportion to the size of its population in 2001. The largest area is London, since it has the highest population of any of the places^{TR}. The map on the right shows the actual boundaries of the areas.

Figure 4: The percentage of employed 30-54 year olds who work long hours across the UK



Discussion

This analysis shows that in general, where higher levels of the population are unemployed those who are working are less likely to be working very long hours. What does this mean? First of all, it prompts us to think about employment as a spectrum, rather than as a simple distinction between 'working' and 'not working'. We know that unemployed people who return to work are more likely to work part time and to earn less as a result. Essentially, the areas in which there is greater unemployment and lower rates of long-hours working are those areas in which there is a generally lower demand for labour. There is, literally, less work to be done and hence less money to be earned. People are more likely to not be working, or to be working part time. It is not the characteristics of the people, but of the places that determines this. In other places, there is more work to be done and hence more people are employed, and more of the employed work longer hours. However, it must be recognised that manual and non-manual workers give significantly different reasons for long-hours working. The reasons for long-hours working vary. Some people choose to work longer, because they are directly rewarded for it, but others have to, or want to, 'get the job done'. For some people, for example nurses and police officers, overtime is an essential and traditional way to top up wages. In managerial and professional positions, long hours may not be directly rewarded, but benefits may be indirect, such as improvement of promotion prospects.

Does this geography of 'work' matter? Long hours at work are thought to have several impacts on workers and their families. Although not conclusive, some recent evidence suggests that long hours are bad for productivity and that reductions increase both employment and productivity (more people work, and those who work, work better when they are not tired)². There are associations between long-hours working and health problems, such as poor mental health and cardiovascular disease. Other (similarly disputed) research shows that long hours take a toll on family life⁷. There is overwhelming evidence that unemployment is bad for the health of the unemployed and that their families and communities suffer from the effects of the resulting poverty^{8,9}. The government's Social Exclusion Unit recently stated that "Living in an area where there are many other workless

people can damage a person's life chances – especially those of children and young people"¹⁰. The maps in this report show that the UK is divided into areas where there is relatively less work and relatively more work (in terms of both jobs and hours). Unemployed people are unemployed, to some extent, because their local labour market cannot provide them with a suitable job. People who work long hours do so because there is a job to be done which demands more of their time (and may or may not directly reward them for it).

So, if the UK can be divided into relatively 'work-rich' and 'work-poor' areas, and in the former there is more work to do than is good for us, and in the latter there is not enough work, the geographic redistribution of work would seem a possible route to solving the problem. Look again at Figure 4 and the areas in which those in work are more likely to work long hours. Some of these areas contain jobs that are geographically specific – jobs in oil and agriculture and other primary industries cannot easily be moved. Jobs in banking, the Civil Service, IT and the media are not as location specific, especially given the availability of telecommunications. To redress the contrasting worlds of 'work' and 'no work', a deliberate process aimed at evening out the demands for labour across the UK and hence redistributing the benefits of a sensible workload, might help to ease the gap between different parts of the country. However, as numerous attempts to redistribute the Civil Service from London have shown, there is more than rationality at play.



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Notes

- ¹ Incomes Data Services (2004) (www.incomesdata.co.uk/statistics/statempl.htm).
 - ² Kodz, J. (2003) *Working long hours: A review of the evidence. Volume 1 – Main report*, Employment Relations Research Series No 16, Institute For Employment Studies, Department for Trade and Industry, November.
 - ³ Begum, N. (2004) *Characteristics of the short-term and long-term unemployed*, Labour Market Trends, London: Office for National Statistics, April.
 - ⁴ 'UK working hours rise sharply' (<http://news.bbc.co.uk>, accessed 29 August 2002).
 - ⁵ ONS Time Series MGSX Labour Force Survey (www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/tsdtimezone.asp, last updated 9 August 2004).
 - ⁶ www.dti.gov.uk/work-lifebalance/
 - ⁷ Department for Education and Employment (2000) *Work-Life Balance 2000 Baseline Survey*, London: Department for Education and Employment.
 - ⁸ Bartley, M. (1994) 'Unemployment and ill health: understanding the relationship', *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, vol 48, pp 333-7.
 - ⁹ Saunders, P. (2002) *The direct and indirect effects of unemployment on poverty and inequality*, SPRC Discussion Paper No 118, Social Policy Research Centre, University of New South Wales (www.sprc.unsw.edu.au/dp/DP118.pdf).
 - ¹⁰ Social Exclusion Unit (2004) 'Jobs and enterprise in deprived areas' (www.socialexclusionunit.gov.uk).
- TR Further information on this point is available in the accompanying technical report.



What do we know?

- ▶ Unemployment has been either falling or stable in recent years, and any fall has been accompanied by a rise in the numbers of people working very long hours.
- ▶ Both not working and working too much have been found to be associated with worse health. Working long hours may damage productivity and work–life balance.
- ▶ Not everyone works longer hours to get more money in their next pay packet. Some reap the rewards later on, some are committed to their work, some have to work to 'get the job done', and some have to work long hours in order to afford to be able to live where they do.

What have we found?

- ▶ There is a geographical divide in the UK between 'work-rich' areas and 'work-poor' areas. This divide is mainly regional rather than local.
- ▶ Areas with higher unemployment rates tend also to have lower proportions of long-hours working among those who do have a job.
- ▶ Encouraging the relocation of jobs from those parts of the country which have more work than can be done by the workforce within the recommended maximum of 48 hours a week towards areas in which there is currently more labour available than work to occupy it might help to reduce differences in experience of work (and incomes earned) across the UK.

Other reports in the series

The companion report to this, *The office*, looks at whether in areas where fewer good jobs are available, highly qualified people are likely to be working in lower grade jobs.

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|-------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. <i>Doctors and nurses</i> | 6. <i>A place in the sun</i> |
| 2. <i>In sickness and in health</i> | 7. <i>The office</i> |
| 3. <i>Teachers</i> | 8. <i>Open all hours</i> |
| 4. <i>Sons and daughters</i> | 9. <i>Top gear</i> |
| 5. <i>Changing rooms</i> | 10. <i>Home front</i> |

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