Britain’s 3 million night workers need fair rights to work-life balance

It used to be that night workers were mainly men in manufacturing plants. Men are still more likely to be night workers. In 2014, 14.9 per cent of male employees were night workers, compared to 9.7 per cent of female employees.

However, the number of women working nights is growing at a much faster rate. Regular night working by women has increased by 12 per cent since 2007, as opposed to a 4 per cent increase for men. And the top two sectors for the total number of night workers are female dominated – care workers and nursing (including midwives).

Plans to increase public transport provision at night, and proposals for a seven-day NHS, are likely to lead to further increases in night work.  The greater availability of night-time transport may also lead to more retail and leisure services adopting night opening.

Unions don’t oppose night working, but argues that employers must properly consider and address the implications for staff. Decisions to extend night working should always involve consultation and negotiation with workers’ representatives to ensure fair and safe outcomes.

The negative health impacts of night work are already well-documented, such as heightened risks of cardiovascular disease, diabetes and depression. However, less attention has been given to the impact on home life and relationships.

A new report published last week by the TUC, *A Hard Day’s Night*, shows that night working has grown since the recession, and there are now over three million employees who are regular night-workers in the UK.  The report highlights the evidence that night working can have a negative impact on work-life balance and family life.

*A Hard Day’s Night* reviews the available research, which shows that night working can increase the risk of relationship problems, can affect the emotional wellbeing of a night worker’s children, and is associated with higher childcare costs. But the negative impacts of night working are less when employees have more influence and control over their shift patterns.

Fairness and safety for night workers, the TUC recommendations include:

* Employers and unions should ensure that night working is only introduced where necessary.
* Where night working is introduced into a workplace, no existing workers should be forced to work nights.
* Shift patterns should be negotiated between unions and employers.
* Workers should have some element of control over their rotas, so that they can ensure that the shifts they work are best suited to their individual circumstances.
* Workers should always have sufficient notice of their shift patterns so they can make arrangements well in advance. Changes at short notice should be avoided.
* The remuneration paid to those working nights should properly reflect the likely additional costs of childcare and inconvenience that night shifts can entail.

We have published recommendations to better protect the wellbeing of night workers and help them give a better service to the public. We encourage the government and employers to positively engage with trade unions on fair and sensible rights for night workers, so that we continue to enjoy the social benefits night workers give us without harm to them or the public.

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