

Working Against the Clock:

**A global survey on how
cleaners' work schedules
impact their health, safety
and well-being.**



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This report has been produced by Jarrow Insights for
UNI Global Union and UNI Europa

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Key takeaways

- Over **2,500 professional cleaners from 32 countries across 3 continents** participated in a survey about the effects of their schedules on their health, well-being and lives.
- **Half of the cleaners surveyed still work shifts outside of the typical day shift.** Based on a statistical analysis of the results of the survey, these cleaners are **demonstrably worse-off than day-shift cleaners** in a number of alarming ways.
- Nearly **70% of night-shift cleaners report not getting enough sleep**, along with over half of cleaners who work the early morning and evening shifts.
- Around **45% of female cleaners who work the night shift report feeling unsafe at work.** The reason is clear. **Over a third say they have been harassed at work** and nearly the same number say they have experienced harassment during their commute.
- **The schedules of evening and night-shift workers conflict with their social and family lives at significantly higher rates than their peers.** The direct testimony of cleaners highlights the particularly negative effect this has on cleaners' relationships with their children and their partners.
- **7 in 10 cleaners who work shifts other than the day shift do so because they have no choice,** whether because they need the higher wages of non-day shifts to make ends meet, or because day shifts are simply unavailable to them.
- On balance, the results of the survey highlight the **urgent ethical responsibility** of all parties involved in the cleaning sector — including cleaning companies, their clients and policy-makers - **to actively promote daytime cleaning.**

Introduction

Every day, all around the world, so much of the crucial infrastructure of society – from hospitals, to airports, to hotels, to offices – is maintained by millions of cleaning professionals. The work they do is indispensable, but it often goes unseen. Many cleaners begin work before the sun rises, or stay long into the night, working shifts that keep them invisible to those who use the facilities they care for.

Shift work — and especially night work - is known to be detrimental to the health, well-being and social inclusion of workers¹. That is why UNI Global Union and UNI Europa have been advocating for a full transition to daytime work in the cleaning sector for over a decade. This year, UNI commissioned an international survey of cleaners in order to examine the progress that has been made towards this goal and to shed a greater light on the way persistent irregular and unsocial shifts affect cleaners around the world.

Over 2,500 cleaners from 32 countries across 6 continents responded to the survey. While their answers indicated some slight differences in country-by-country conditions, more striking was the high degree of similarity across borders. When it comes to the way work schedules impact their lives, **cleaners world-wide face the same challenges.**

The results of the survey are clear: **cleaners who work shifts other than the day shift are worse off than their peers.** The specific, observable effects are varied and diverse, but highly interrelated. Evening and night workers struggle to find time to see their friends and families. When they manage to, they often do not have the energy to make the most of their time, as poor sleep schedules and exhaustion affect both physical and mental health. Relationships are strained. Social life is sacrificed.

Given these facts, supported by the grimly consistent picture painted by over **10,000 words of testimony** from respondents, why do cleaners work shifts other than the day shift at all? The overwhelming majority simply **do not have a choice.** Sometimes this lack of agency is direct: many employers and clients do not offer daytime shifts. For most cleaners, however, it comes down to economics. Non-daytime shifts often pay better. As working-class people around the world struggle to make ends meet with the rising cost of living, higher wages for night work appear less like a bonus and more like a necessity.

¹ James, S. M., Honn, K. A., Gaddameedhi, S., & Van Dongen, H. P. (2017). Shift work: disrupted circadian rhythms and sleep—implications for health and well-being. *Current sleep medicine reports*, 3, 104-112.

Even so, despite economic pressure, most cleaners who exclusively work the day-shift said **they would not switch to working nights, even for better pay**. As one Tunisian cleaner put it:

“My life is more important than money.”

This report presents a comprehensive look at the results of the survey, from both a quantitative and a qualitative perspective, keeping the voices of cleaners in their own words at the forefront. As we will see, many cleaners indeed face an impossible choice: a choice between a healthy, relaxed, socially-fulfilling life and the money necessary to live at all.

**“We are lost,
tired and
desperate”**

- Belgian multi-shift cleaner

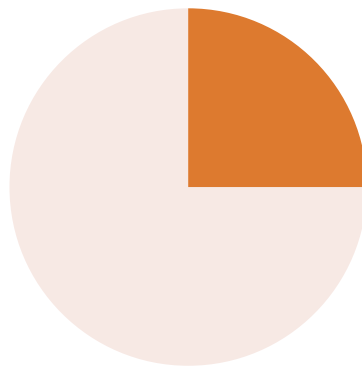


A portrait of cleaners in 2023

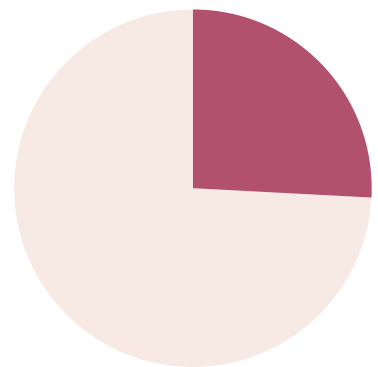
The sample obtained from the survey is representative of the known demographics of the global cleaning workforce as a whole^{2,3}. Nearly 70% of respondents identified as female, while around 25% identified as immigrants in the country where they work and 20% identified as people of colour⁴.



55% of respondents reported working 20 to 40 hours a week.



Over a quarter said they work more than 40 hours a week.



26.2% of respondents said they work more than one job and these cleaners were about 30% more likely to work more than 40 hours a week.

When do cleaners work?

Only 30.3% of cleaners surveyed indicated that they exclusively work standard **day shifts** (e.g. starting around 8 or 9am and ending around 5 or 6pm). The rest said they regularly work at least some afternoon, evening, early morning, or night shifts in an average month. **Just half of respondents work only during one specific period of the day.** The most common shift combination reported was early morning and day shifts, but many respondents also said they regularly work 3 or more different types of shifts in an average month.

2 Ramioul, M., Kirov, V., Hauptmeier, M., & Vidal, M. (2014). Quality of work in the cleaning industry: a complex picture based on sectoral regulation and customer-driven conditions.

3 Rho, H. J., Brown, H., & Fremstad, S. (2020). A basic demographic profile of workers in frontline industries. Center for economic and policy research, 7(10).

4 An in-depth presentation of country-by-country demographic and shift statistics can be found in Appendix B.

Most common reported schedules among respondents

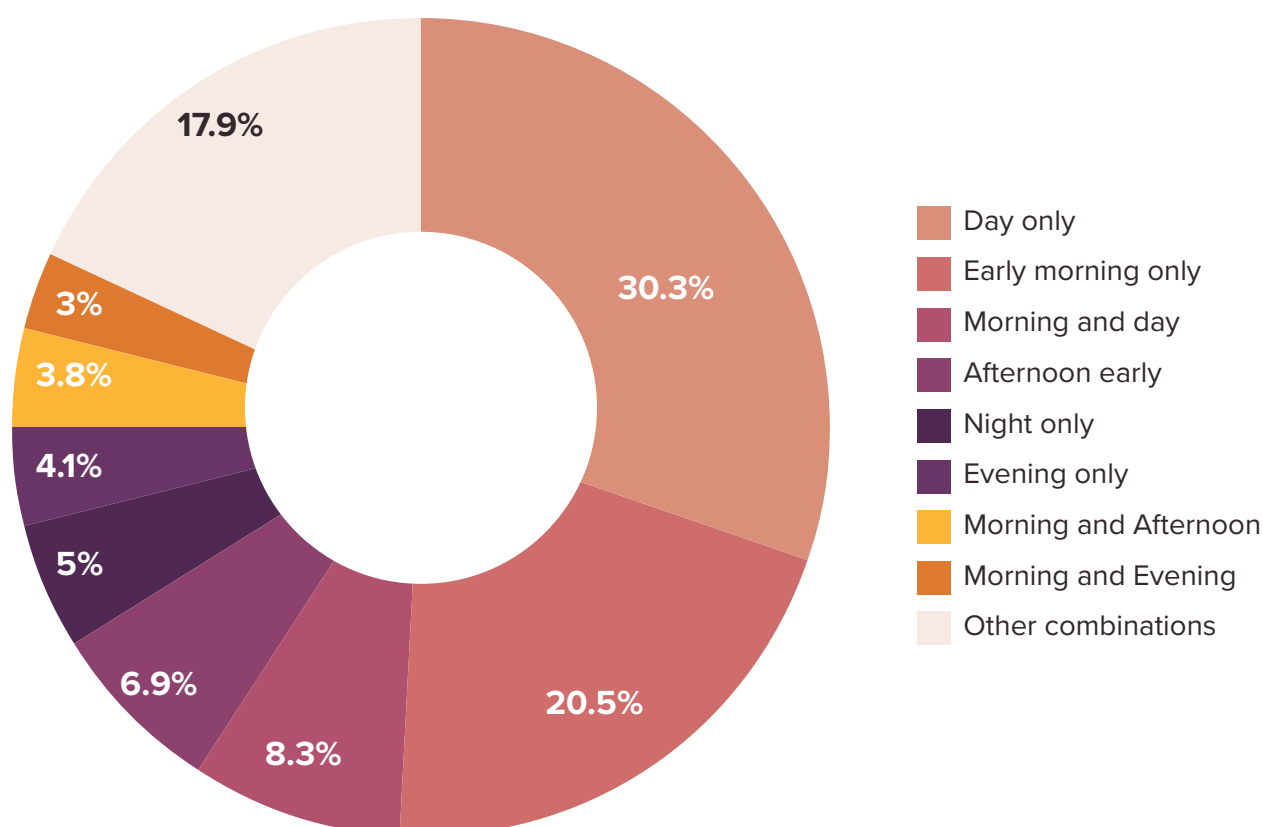


Fig. 1 Percentages of respondents who reported working various combination of shifts.

How does the cleaning sector work?

Commercial cleaning arrangements generally consist of 4 types of actors: the **client**, the **cleaning company**, the **end users** and the **cleaners** themselves. The **client** is the owner or operator of a given facility, while the **end users** are the people (workers or customers) who actually use the facility, whether it be an office, a school, an airport, or anything else.

Clients commonly outsource cleaning to commercial **cleaning companies** in order to reduce their own labour costs. Cleaning companies employ **cleaners**, who do the actual work of maintaining the facility. The client will try to pay the lowest possible price for cleaning service, incentivizing the cleaning company to cut corners in their operations, leaving both cleaners and end users worse off.

Around 13% of workers surveyed said they regularly work night shifts. In some countries, such as Colombia, Tunisia and the United States, this number was 20% or above. Given what is known about the many adverse effects of night work, its persistence at such significant levels is concerning, not least to cleaners themselves. At one point in the survey, cleaners who work exclusively during the daytime were asked how their life might change if they had to start working nights. The intensity of many replies evokes a sense of extreme anxiety at the prospect, along with a keen understanding of what it would mean for them:

“It’s the worst shift” - **Argentine day-shift cleaner**

“I would resign” - **New Zealander day-shift cleaner**

“It would be awful” - **US day-shift cleaner**

“It would ruin me” - **Finnish day-shift cleaner**

“Life would be completely turned upside down” - **German day-shift cleaner**

“I see how it affects others” - **Irish day-shift cleaner**

As we will see in the following pages, statistics prove them right.

The health costs of invisible work

Cleaners who only work day shifts get better sleep, have better diets, consume less cigarettes and alcohol and report less effects on their mental health than their peers who work other shifts.

The results of the survey show **significant adverse health effects** afflicting cleaners who work at night. Many can be traced back to a single, fundamental root cause - so fundamental that several respondents expressed it in nearly identical words:

“Night is for sleeping”

How does your work schedule impact your life?

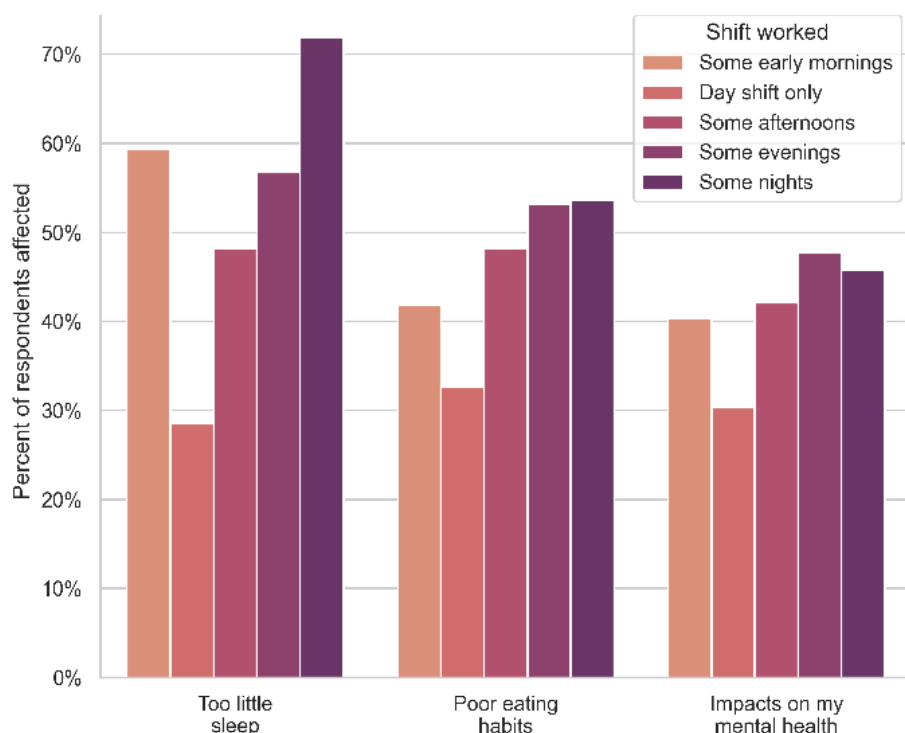


Fig. 2 Respondents who work shifts other than the day shift experience higher rates of adverse health effects.⁵

Figure 2 above presents the incidence of several health problems among workers of various shifts, as reported in the survey. As can be seen, sleep is particularly challenging for those who work outside the day shift. Nearly **7 out of 10 night cleaners reported getting too little sleep**, compared to just 3 out of 10 of cleaners who work only day shifts.

⁵ The data used to produce all figures in this report can be found in Appendix A



While this particular challenge of the night shift is perhaps the most obvious one, the numbers are striking. Sleep is not optional for the maintenance of a healthy life and these results suggest that nighttime cleaners find it nearly impossible to adequately “adapt” their sleep schedules to a nocturnal rhythm. Several respondents who work exclusively during the day spoke to this issue directly.

“I need sleep and this is not possible during the day” - Belgian day-shift cleaner

“During the day there is sun and too much noise to sleep” - Colombian day-shift cleaner

Being tired on the job exposes workers to greater risks. As one German night cleaner noted, “accidents at work often happen at night”. Still, the effects of poor sleep go beyond the immediate. Adequate rest is key to helping the body heal from the physical strains of cleaning work⁶ and prolonged sleep deprivation has other well-known long-term health effects, which some workers were aware of:

“The body was created to rest at night and not to work. That is why most night workers have high blood pressure.” - UK night cleaner

It is important to note that while night-shift workers suffer the most in this regard, more than half of those who work early mornings and evenings also report getting too little sleep. **By far, the least sleep-deprived workers are those who only work day shifts.**

⁶ Eric Decabooter. (2013). “Ergonomics in Cleaning Operations”. Published by ECFI, UNI Europa, Centre de Formation du Nettoyage.

This pattern repeats itself across a range of other adverse health issues, as can be seen in Figure 2. The percentage of cleaners reporting poor eating habits as a result of their work schedule rises steadily from 41.8% to nearly 54% as the day goes on. Maintaining a regular diet is easier for morning and day workers, while over half of both evening and night workers struggle to do so.



HALF OF CLEANERS WHO WORK EVENING OR NIGHT SHIFTS REPORT POOR EATING HABITS

How do you think your life would change if you started working only day shifts?

"I would be able to sleep better and I would be able to eat dinner"

- Peruvian night cleaner

"I would sleep and eat well, I wouldn't be so tired, I would get less sick."

- Colombian multi-shift cleaner

"Better eating hours. Better health. Better hours of sleep." - **Belgian multi-shift cleaner**

Aside from physical health, a shared understanding emerges from cleaner testimony about the holistic negative impact of non-day shifts on other aspects of well-being. Alarming, the percentage of night workers who indicated that their schedules lead them to consume too much alcohol, cigarettes and other substances was more than double that of their peers (12.2% versus 5.4%). **Nearly 46% of night cleaners and 48% of evening cleaners cited negative impacts on their mental health** as a result of their work schedule - while only 30.3% of exclusively day-shift cleaners said the same.

While some of this difference may be explained by sleep deprivation, cleaners working early mornings, afternoons, evenings and nights also reported **much higher rates of social isolation** than their peers on the day shift.

How do you think your life would change if you started working only day shifts?

“I can sleep longer and not be so tired all the time. Also my mental health would be much better.”

- Finnish morning-shift cleaner

“More sleep, more joy at work and as stress-free as possible”

- German morning-shift cleaner

Given the evidence presented above, it is abundantly clear that non-daytime shifts are harmful to cleaners. Lack of sleep has long-term consequences for both physical and mental health⁷. Afternoon, evening and night shifts conflict with standard meal times and leave cleaners with few options for fresh and healthy food, leading to poor dietary habits. As the following section will show, working at night also exposes cleaners to other risks less immediately connected with health — risks that come not from pushing their own bodies to their physical limits, but from other people.

**“You feel as if
you are not
normal”**

- Tunisian night-shift cleaner



⁷ Orzeł-Gryglewska, J. (2010). Consequences of sleep deprivation. *Int J Occup Med Environ Health*, 23(1), 95-114.

Dangers of the night

“Being on the night shift is a life of insecurity”

- Female Peruvian cleaner

Female cleaners who work night shifts face disturbingly high rates of harassment compared to their peers on other shifts, according to the results of the survey.

Cleaners who work outside of daytime hours often find themselves commuting and working in the darkness, exposing them to risks they might otherwise avoid if their jobs did not require it of them. In this section, it will become clear that these risks are not shared equally among all cleaners. Survey respondents were asked if they ever feel unsafe at work. As Figure 3 below shows, their answers expose a complex gender dynamic.

Do you ever feel unsafe at work?

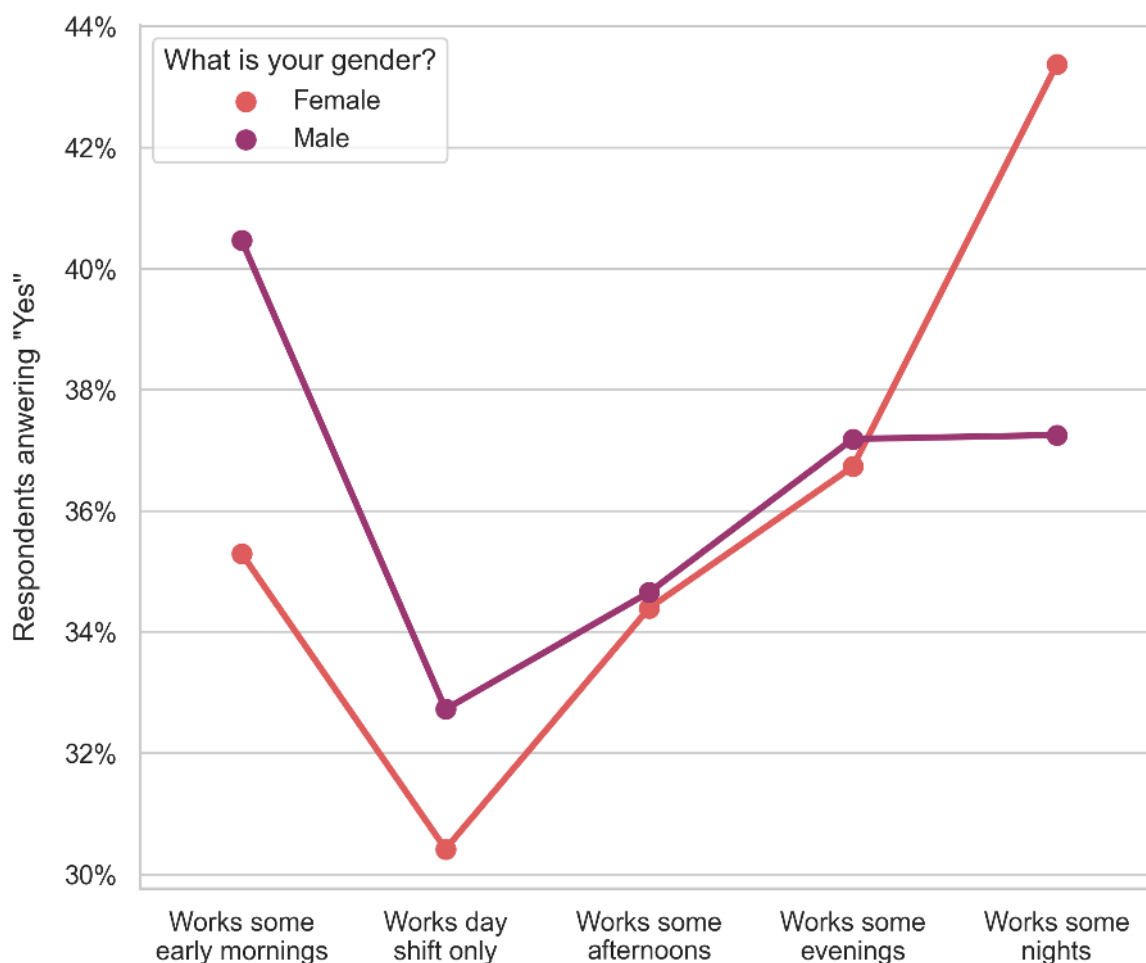


Fig. 3 Female cleaners who work evenings and nights are much more likely than others to feel unsafe at work.

It is apparent that male and female cleaners feel distinct levels of insecurity on the job. Interestingly, the gap in perceived safety between genders varies across shifts. During the morning shift, male cleaners feel less safe than females. This gap persists to some extent into the day shift and may be due to a social tendency for males to be assigned more physically demanding tasks - that question is out of the scope of the survey.

As the day continues into afternoon and night, however, the percentage of female cleaners who sometimes feel unsafe rises quickly, from a low of 30.4% on the day shift to a high of 43.4% on the night shift, far surpassing the percentage of male night-shift workers who feel the same (37.3%). The following two figures, 4 and 5, help explain this unsettling, if unsurprising, shift.

Have you ever been harassed on the way to or from work?

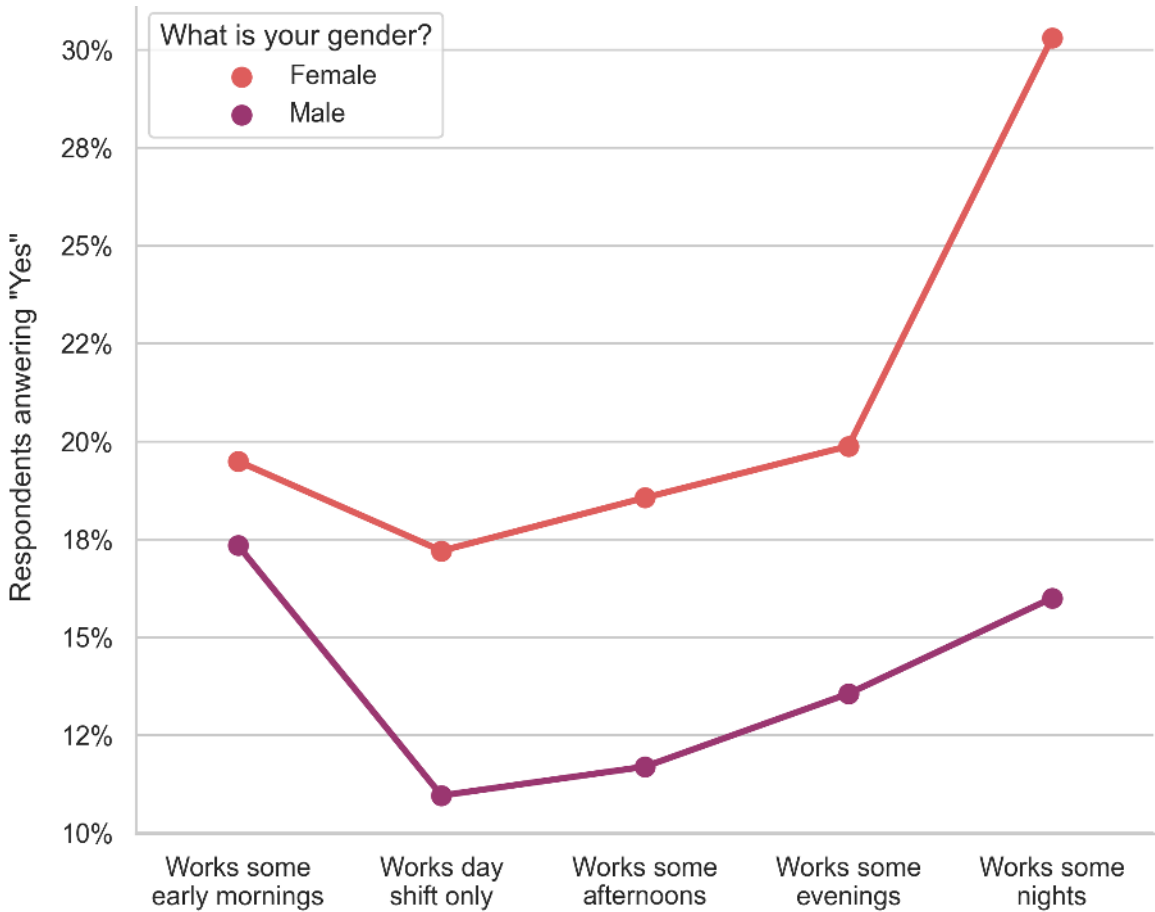


Fig. 4 Female cleaners always experience higher rates of harassment than males on the commute to and from work, but night shift workers suffer the most by far.

Respondents were asked whether they had ever been harassed on the way to or from work. The conclusion, reflected in Figure 4, cannot be understated: **female cleaners who work the night shift are much more likely to be harassed while commuting than their peers on other shifts**. The spike in reported harassment is sharp, jumping from a stable point under 20% for female cleaners of all shifts from morning until evening, to over 30% for night workers. It should be noted that male cleaners also report relatively higher levels of harassment during their commutes in both the early mornings and at night.

Have you ever been harassed at work?

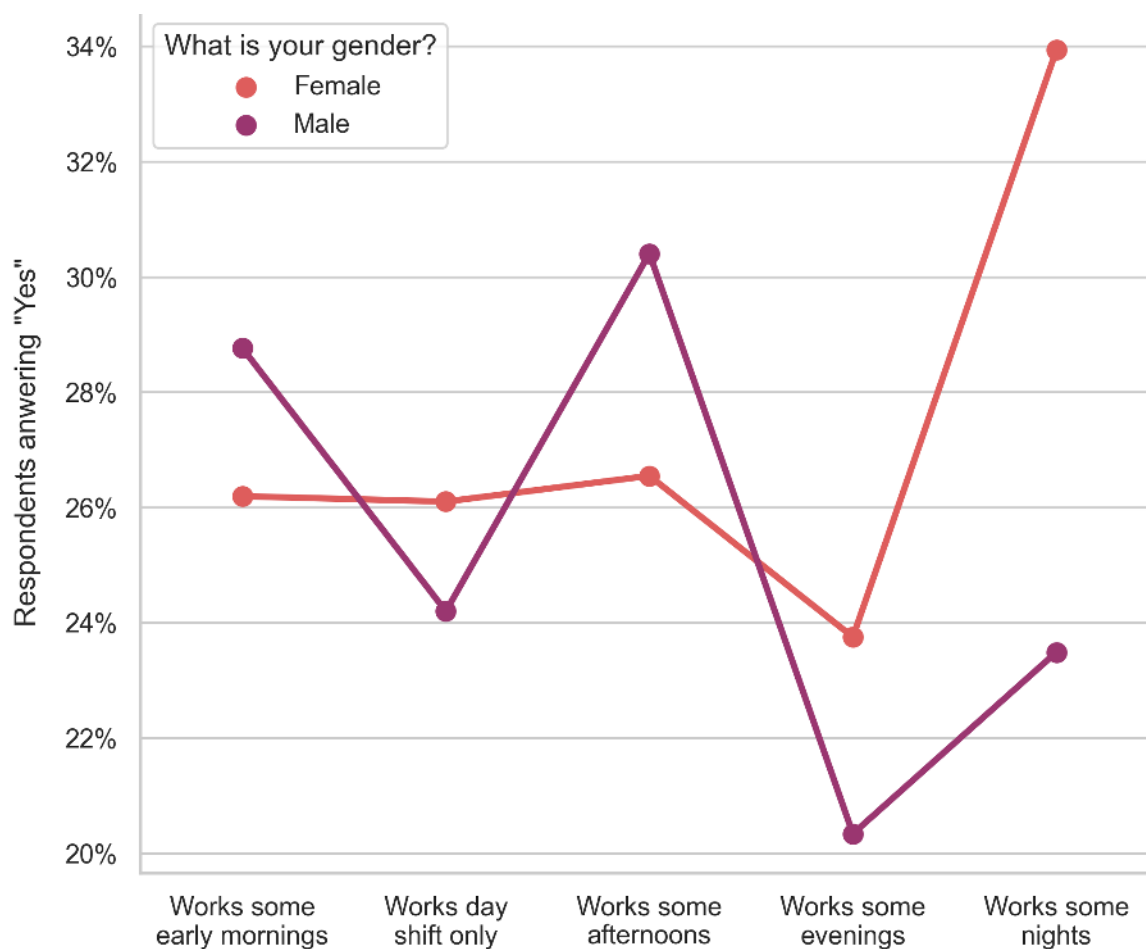


Fig. 5 Female night-shift cleaners also face comparatively high levels of harassment at work.

When considering the issue of harassment on the job, rather than during the commute to or from work, the gender gap is narrower throughout most of the day. However, we can observe that, once again, female cleaners who work at night appear to experience workplace harassment at higher rates than their peers on other shifts and at statistically significantly higher rates than those who work only day shifts.

All together, **more than 4 in 10 women who work the night shift said they have been harassed either at work, or on the way to or from work.** There is already evidence that cleaners face increased levels of harassment on the night shift⁸, but the results of the survey show it plainly and definitively. The solution — letting cleaners work during the day — is equally clear.

⁸ "Rape on the Night Shift." (2018). Frontline, season 2018, episode 11, PBS., https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6zeGu_tgw9c (accessed May 26, 2023)

Regional differences in safety

“Working at night makes us more vulnerable than others to various types of physical, moral and sexual violence, whether from the public or from co-workers. Working at night is exhausting, both psychologically and sexually and these few millimes [smallest division of Tunisian currency] that we receive in addition to the wages for day shifts are not enough to fill the hunger of family stomachs.” - Tunisian night-shift cleaner

The results of the survey generally presented a clear and cohesive picture of the experience of shift cleaning on an international scale. However, some significant country-by-country differences emerged on the question of safety.

Do you ever feel unsafe at work?

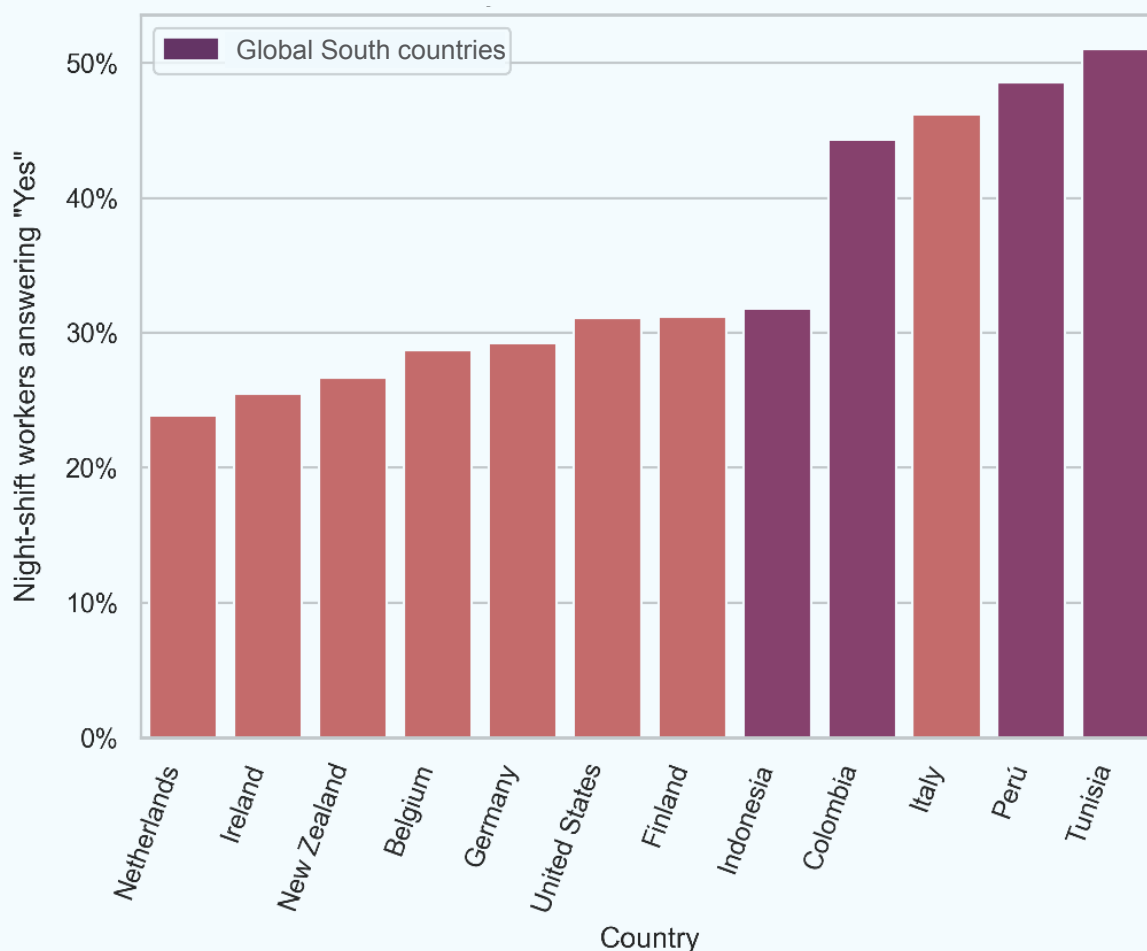


Fig. 6 Perceptions of workplace safety vary widely by country and region

As Figure 6 above shows, in a handful of countries — mostly in the Global South, although Italy is a marked exception — cleaners who work shifts other than the day shift feel unsafe at work rates considerably higher than workers elsewhere.

“The path home at night is prone to crime” - Indonesian night-shift cleaner

“The night is very dangerous” - Peruvian day-shift cleaner

“[If I only worked the day shift], I would not have to run the dangers of the street”

- Colombia multi-shift cleaner

While the results of the survey as a whole show the urgency of the transition to daytime cleaning, the high levels of insecurity — and resulting mental anguish — among cleaners in certain countries of study makes the crisis appear even more immediate. On the other hand, while the situation in other countries is comparatively better, it is worth emphasizing that — even in the best case — more than 1 in 5 night-shift cleaners in the Netherlands feel unsafe at work, along with nearly a 1 in 3 German, US and Finnish workers — numbers that are undeniably far too high.

**“I waste time that
should be spent
with my family”**

-Peruvian morning-shift cleaner



Hard to keep up

Cleaners who work the evening and night shifts are nearly twice as likely as day-shift cleaners to say that their work schedules get in the way of their social and family lives.

Unsocial shifts put cleaners out of sync with those around them, with damaging effects on their social life. Figure 7 renders the picture clearly: cleaners who work shifts from the afternoon onwards are much more likely than morning and day-shift workers to say that their schedules prevent them from seeing family and friends. The effect is most extreme for evening and night-shift workers, nearly half of whom say their schedule “often” or “very often” prevents them from seeing family and friends. Conversely, only a quarter of cleaners who exclusively work day shifts said the same.



How often does your work schedule prevent you from seeing family and friends?

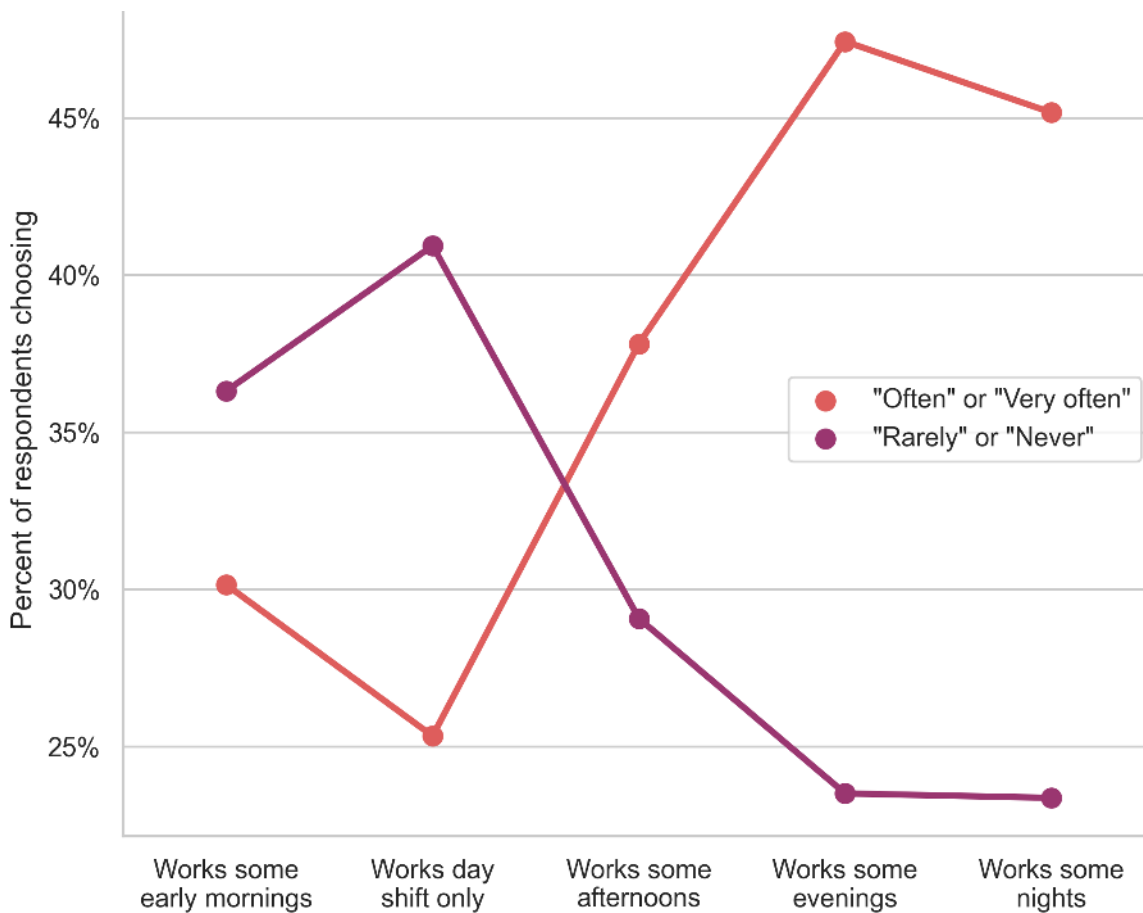


Fig. 7 Evening and night shift workers say their work schedule prevents them from seeing their family and friends at much higher rates than others

Social relationships need nurturing and attention in order to thrive. In other words, they need time. As these numbers show, it is precisely this crucial time that cleaners are robbed of when they are made to work evening and night shifts. Testimony from hundreds of cleaners suggests that family life may be what suffers most.

"No time to see my children. I go out before them and when I come back they are sleeping." - Belgian evening-shift cleaner

"It's hard to see my parents." - Indonesian multi-shift cleaner

"I can't spend time with my daughter who is only 6 years old" - Peruvian night cleaner

"I wish I was a better wife and a mother. So hard to keep up" - Finnish evening-shift cleaner

"Little time to share with my family, my children" - Panamanian afternoon shift cleaner

A sense of opportunities missed and time lost, together with guilt, fills many of these reflections. However, there is also a common understanding that a better situation is possible. Asked how daytime work would change their lives, many respondents over and over envisioned a powerful change in their family relations.

*“I would have more time to devote myself to my child to see her grow up and share moments with my partner.” - **Belgian multi-shift cleaner***

*“I’d be home in the evenings with my wife and kid.” - **US multi-shift cleaner***

*“I would have more time with my daughter” - **Norwegian afternoon-shift cleaner***

*“I could dedicate more time to my son’s education” - **Argentine afternoon-shift cleaner***

*“I would manage to look at my family.” - **Italian multi-shift cleaner***

The personal and social costs of the sacrifices cleaners make in order to adapt to unsocial schedules are difficult to calculate, although some useful attempts have been made⁹. On the other hand, the benefits of realizing the desires of many cleaners - to simply have the time necessary to spend with their partners, children and parents - would likely be immense, first and foremost for cleaners and their families, but also for cleaning companies, customers and society as a whole.

⁹ Arlinghaus, A., Bohle, P., Iskra-Golec, I., Jansen, N., Jay, S., & Rotenberg, L. (2019). Working Time Society consensus statements: Evidence-based effects of shift work and non-standard working hours on workers, family and community. *Industrial health*, 57(2), 184-200.

Not normal

The rest of the world does not wait for cleaners to clock out from shifts that push into the evening and late into the night. Most people take for granted the separation of their daily rhythms into moments for work, personal life and sleep. These social norms provide a sense of stability and normalcy. For cleaners, this rhythm is constantly broken, so that many are forced to dance out of step with the world around them. As a result, as one Tunisian night-shift cleaner put it:

“You feel as if you are not normal”

Normalcy, structure and regularity are all themes that appear and reappear throughout worker testimony, particularly when respondents shared how a shift to daytime cleaning might impact their lives:

“I would have more time for groceries and to go outside. When I leave work, everything is closed.” - Dutch evening-shift cleaner.

*“It would be more regulated. I could meet up with friends, sleep regularly, cook and eat.”
- German multi-shift cleaner*

*“I could get more structure in my life and sleep better and eat more consciously.”
- Dutch night-shift cleaner*

“I could return to normal.” - US night-shift cleaner

“I would have a life” - Argentine multi-shift cleaner

Worth the sacrifice?

“My reason I work three jobs is for money. If one job paid enough for me to live I’d be so happy and thankful. I don’t have time for anything because I need more money.”

- US multi-shift cleaner

The majority of cleaners who work shifts other than the day shift do so because they need the extra pay to make ends meet, according to the results of the survey. For many others, day shifts simply are not an option. All together, nearly 7 in 10 cleaners work non-day shifts because they effectively have no choice.

We have seen how early morning, evening and night work negatively impact cleaners’ lives in so many fundamental ways, from their health, to their safety, to their social and family lives. Why, then, do less than a third of workers work exclusively day shifts? And why do nearly 30% of cleaners report that they work the most damaging shifts of all, in the evenings and at night? **Many feel they simply have no choice.** Respondents were asked to what extent they agreed with the statement: “I have control over my work schedule”. Comparing the responses of night-shift workers to the rest of cleaners, as Figure 8 below does, is revealing.

Agreement with statement: “I have control over my work schedule”

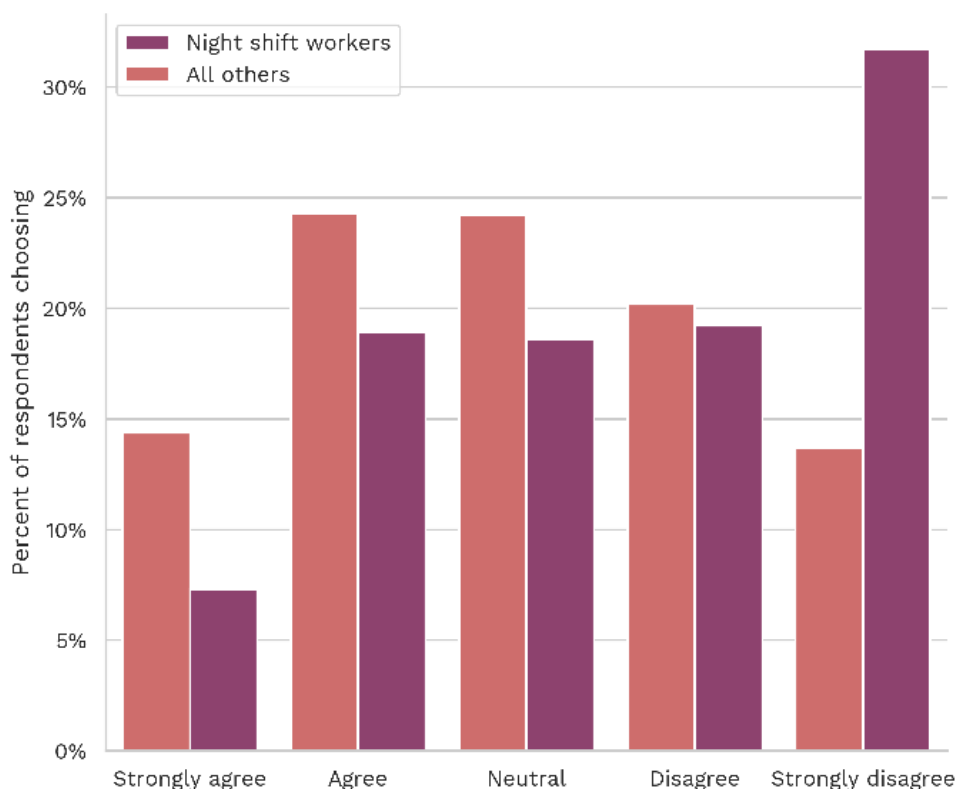


Fig. 8 Cleaners who work the night shift feel strongly that they do not have control over their work schedules

Roughly 51% of cleaners who work night shifts feel they don't have control over their schedules, compared to just 33.9% of cleaners who do not work at night. Night cleaners also expressed their feelings on this issue more intensely than any other group. Nearly 32% said they *strongly* disagreed that they have control over their schedules: 6% higher than the same number for evening cleaners and a full 20% higher than the percentage for day cleaners. This dramatic difference is distinctly visible in Figure 8.

Cleaners who work exclusively day shifts are much more likely to feel they have control over their schedules than workers on other shifts (30% more likely than morning shift workers and over 60% more likely than night shift workers). High levels of schedule control are known to be positively correlated with workers' subjective health¹⁰, a fact that the results of the survey reconfirm. **Over half of respondents who feel they lack control over their schedule also said their schedule affects their mental health.** Among those who feel they do have control over their schedule, that number falls precipitously, to less than a quarter.

Control and autonomy at work are widely understood to be important aspects of job quality.¹¹ That said, they are complex issues and a lack of control can stem from many factors. In order to better understand the specific pressures and needs that drive cleaners to accept work outside the day shift, respondents were asked to specify one or more reasons why they work the shifts that they do. Their answers, in aggregate, are shown in Figure 9.

What keeps you from working only day shifts? (Multiple selection)

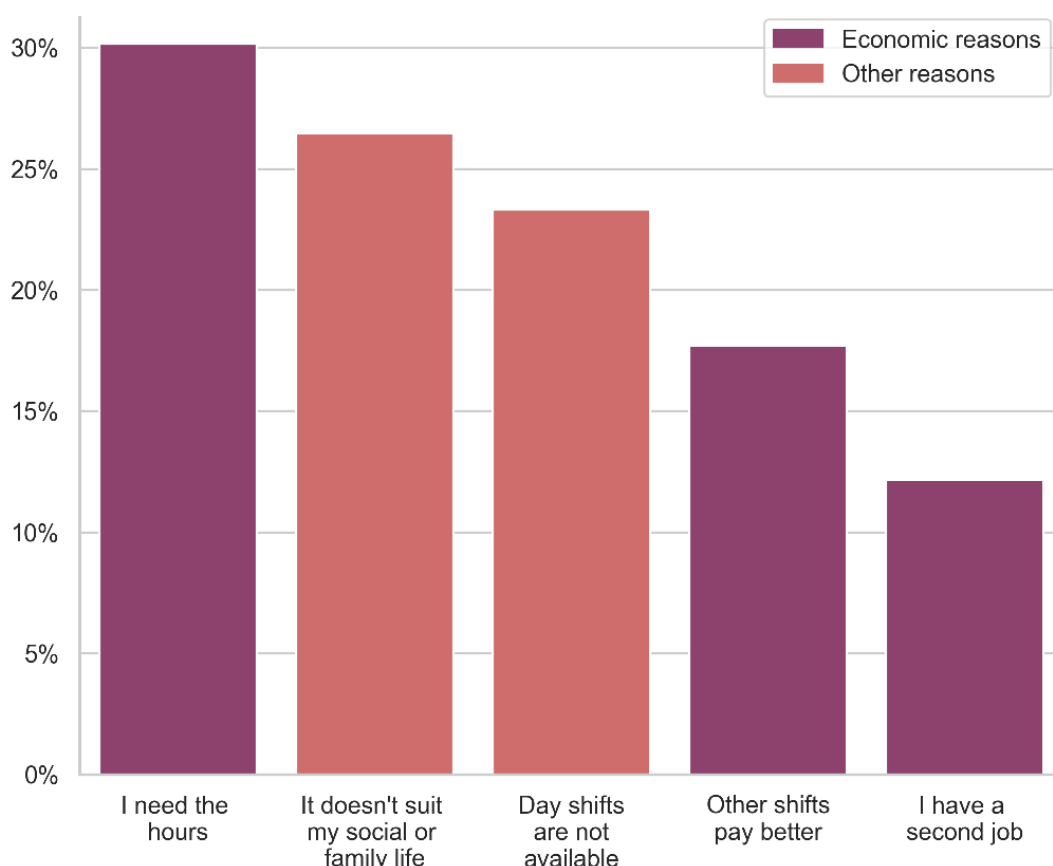


Fig. 9 The majority of respondents who work shifts other than the day shift cited economic motivations for doing so.

¹⁰ Brauner, C., Wöhrmann, A. M., Frank, K., & Michel, A. (2019). Health and work-life balance across types of work schedules: A latent class analysis. *Applied Ergonomics*, 81, 102906.

¹¹ de Bustillo, R. M., Fernández-Macías, E., Antón, J. I., & Esteve, F. (2009). Indicators of job quality in the European Union. Brussels: EU.

Around a quarter of cleaners who work shifts other than the day shift indicated that day shifts are simply not available. Another third said that exclusive daytime work would not suit other aspects of their lives, such as family time or their study schedule. **For over half of respondents, however, the problem was one of economic necessity.**

This survey was conducted in the middle of a global cost of living crisis that is bearing down on workers everywhere. As it stands, non-day shifts often pay a higher hourly wage than day shifts. This premium is paid with the understanding that these shifts are less desirable — and indeed with a more implicit acknowledgement that they are harmful. In theory, these hours might be taken by those who “prefer” higher wages. In practice, they tend to be accepted by those who are most immediately, financially desperate.

“If the pay was enough I would only work days” - New Zealander evening-shift cleaner

“I have an evening part time job because my full time salary is not enough to cater all my needs.”- Finland evening-shift cleaner

*“I would always adapt when the salary is worth the sacrifice.”
- Peruvian day-shift cleaner*

“[If I start working nights] I think my life will improve because I will be able to provide more for my family and myself.”- South African day-shift cleaner

*“[If I start working nights] I would have more money to sustain my needs”
- Kenyan day-shift cleaner*

Taking unpleasant work because you need the additional money to survive or to feed your family hardly constitutes a choice. In fact, if we combine the volumes of workers who cited economic concerns together with those who simply said no day shifts are available, we arrive at the conclusion that **68.4% of cleaners who work shifts other than the day shift do so because they have no choice. When considering only cleaners who work either evening or night shifts, that number rises to 82.5%.**

68.4% of cleaners who work shifts other than the day shift do so because they have no choice. When considering only cleaners who work either evening or night shifts, that number rises to 82.5%.

What about the remaining cleaners? As Figure 9 shows, over a quarter cite conflicts with their family or social life as a reason for not working exclusively day shifts. An earlier section of this report showed the painful impact of family time taken away by unsocial shifts. As such, pointing to the family as a reason to stay on the evening or night shift might seem surprising, but workers’ own explanations provide clarity. In several instances, respondents noted the struggle of arranging childcare in a situation where both parents have to work.

“[If I worked only day shifts, I could do] more social activities.

But childcare is also very difficult” - Dutch multi-shift cleaner

“I work well in the afternoon shift because I can exchange childcare with my husband”

- Irish evening shift cleaner

“I don’t want to work the day shift because I have to babysit my kids during the day”

- Dutch night-shift cleaner

Once again, we can see how an apparent preference for night work can mask economic pressures, as well as political failures: in this case, insufficient options for childcare, forcing families to sacrifice quality time together so at least one parent can always be free for other needs.

Spotlight

The issue of low pay for daytime work and insufficient hours, came through particularly strongly in the testimony of Italian cleaners.

“I wouldn’t even be able to pay the rent because the hourly wage is outrageously low.” -

Italian night-shift cleaner

“It would change for the worse, because I wouldn’t receive paid night work, ordinary work at 7.15 gross per hour, a national disgrace.”

- Italian night-shift cleaner

“I would have less hours of work. Full-time employment contracts are now rare. You have to collect part-time contracts, therefore even hours of night hours, to arrive at a decent salary at the end of the month.”

- Italian multi-shift cleaner

“The salary of cleaners needs to be higher!!!”

- Italian multi-shift cleaner

It must be said that a few cleaners do in fact prefer evening or night work, for a variety of reasons. Some mention the relative calm of cleaning an empty building as opposed to one that’s full, busy and perhaps chaotic. Others enjoy the freedom to get things like errands and appointments done during the day. While these respondents form a small minority, their clearly stated preferences emphasize that the most pro-worker policy would be one that gives workers as much agency and control as possible. Real control means not having to choose between a living wage and fulfilling life. Government policy can play a crucial role in achieving this kind of real control in the cleaning sector, but lasting change will come from collective agreements led by cleaners’ organizations — their unions.

Conclusions

*“So much would change. The purpose of life would change if I worked between 8 a.m. and 3 or 4 p.m., for example. It would mean more time for ourselves and more of the day left. It would no longer be the case that it’s already dark when work is over and you soon have to go to sleep. But our working hours should also be increased. A minimum hourly rate would be very nice. You understand everyone wants to have everything clean, but they do not take care of us. The main thing is that it’s cheap, but nobody wants to work for that price.” - **Austrian multi-shift cleaner***

Many of the results of this report are distressing. They suggest that there is still a considerable way to go in the transition to full daytime cleaning. Meanwhile, the numbers show that cleaners are suffering real and often lasting harm from working unsocial shifts in the early morning and late into the night — shifts they often take out of sheer economic necessity.

The fundamental needs of human beings are not going to change. Nighttime and daytime are not going to change. The same cannot be said for the cleaning industry. Many of the perceived barriers to full daytime cleaning can now be overcome with the help of new technologies and organisational methods¹². Increasingly, it is entrenched cultures and not the practicalities of the job, that stand in the way of better lives for cleaners.

Given the evident and disturbing negative effects of unsocial cleaning shifts, there is an ethical imperative for all parties involved in the cleaning sector — the companies purchasing and offering cleaning services, as well as the governments responsible for regulating the sector — to actively promote daytime cleaning. The cleaning workforce is disproportionately female and disproportionately made up of migrants, as the sample for the survey reflected. Failing cleaners means failing these groups as well and failing to live up to the values of an inclusive society.

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¹²Joint Social Partner Statement: Daytime cleaning, a pillar for social rights in the cleaning sector.” (2022). Published by UNI Europa and ECFI.

While the main beneficiaries of a shift to full daytime cleaning would and should be cleaners themselves, the industry as a whole stands to gain. It seems apparent that the dominance of night shifts, shift work and unsocial hours are contributing to the labour shortages in the cleaning sector. Reversing this trend means improving the conditions of cleaners' work. It means increasing cleaners' visibility in our workplaces, in our daily lives and in society at large. The results of this survey should help guide policy conversations on these topics and more, including proposals for working time reduction and improved work-life balance for cleaners and other key workers.

Throughout this report, we have heard direct quotes from dozens of cleaners in their own words. They were a selection from among hundreds of others. Respondents' visions of how daytime work would change their lives were particularly diverse — as diverse as their lives — but they often touched on similar themes. Of all the words they used in their responses, the most common was a simple one: “time”. As we have seen again and again throughout this report, this is what many cleaners hope to reclaim by joining their peers on the day shift. They hope to reclaim time — time for family, time to sleep, time for life. The time to help them achieve these hopes is now.

**| They hope to reclaim time — time for family, time to sleep, time for life.
| The time to help them achieve these hopes is now.**

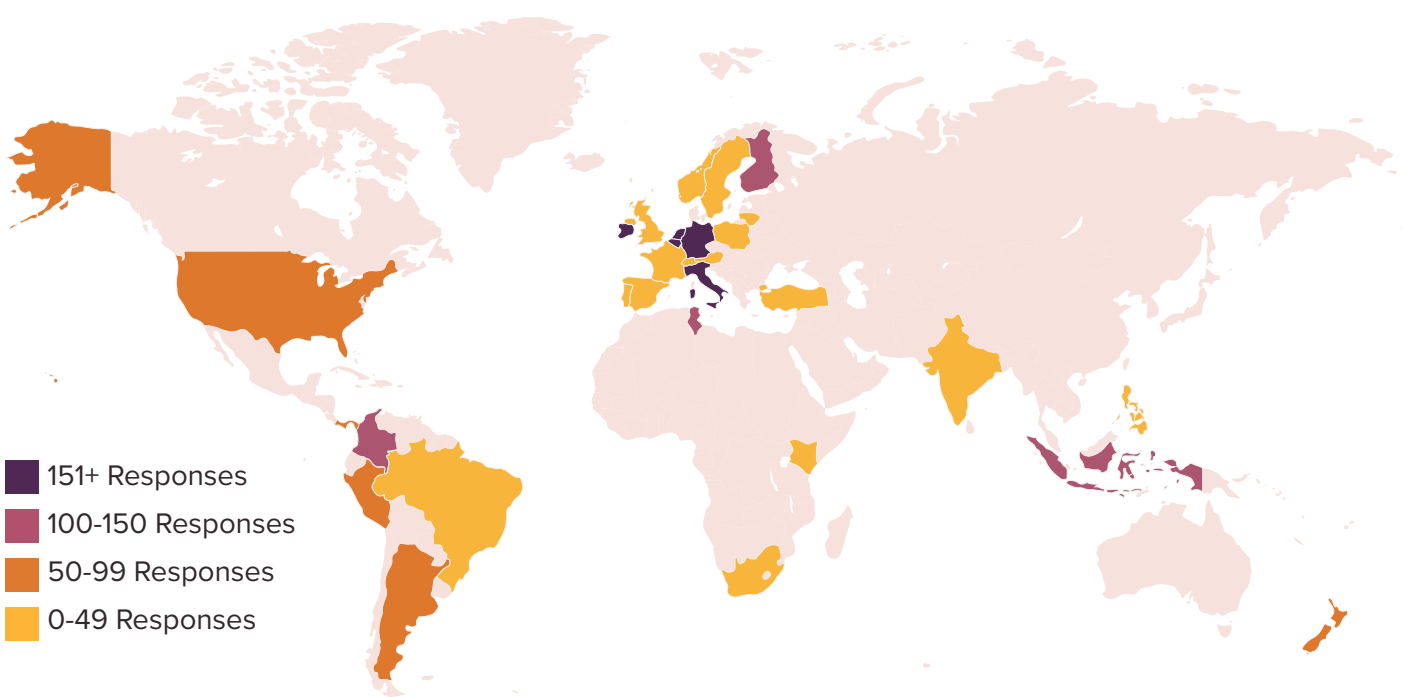
Appendix A.

Data tables

The following tables present the data used to produce all of the figures shown in the report.

Response counts by country

Country	Survey response count	Country	Survey response count
Germany	478	Kenya	34
Belgium	308	India	33
Netherlands	221	UK	25
Italy	203	Austria	25
Ireland	180	Sweden	5
Tunisia	140	France	4
Finland	136	Poland	3
Colombia	118	Phillipines	1
Indonesia	117	Brazil	1
Peru	97	Portugal	1
United States	90	Switzerland	1
New Zealand	82	Spain	1
Argentina	63	Malta	1
Panama	50	Turkey	1
South Africa	44	Lithuania	1
Norway	44	Bahrain	1



Data table for Figure 2

How does your work schedule impact your life? (Multiple selection)

	Some morning shifts	Day shift only	Some afternoon shifts	Some evening shifts	Some night shifts
Too little sleep	59.3%	28.5%	48.2%	56.7%	72.0%
Poor eating habits	41.8%	32.7%	48.2%	53.2%	53.7%
Impacts on my mental health	40.4%	30.3%	42.1%	47.7%	45.7%
Too much alcohol/cigarettes/other substances	7.8%	4.6%	8.9%	9.6%	12.2%
Sample size	1140	762	606	476	328

Yellow indicates statistically significant difference from same-row value for cleaners who work only day shifts, based on the Chi-Square test for independence with $p < 0.05$

Data table for Figures 3-5, Female cleaners

	Works some early mornings	Works day shift only	Works some afternoons	Works some evenings	Works some night shifts
Do you ever feel unsafe at work?	34.6%	30.2%	34.0%	36.5%	42.8%
Have you ever been harassed on the way to / from work?	19.5%	17.2%	18.4%	20.0%	30.6%
Have you ever been harassed at work?	25.9%	26.0%	26.9%	23.5%	33.9%
Sample size	815	530	412	345	168

Yellow indicates statistically significant difference from same-row value for cleaners who work only day shifts, based on the Chi-Square test for independence with $p < 0.05$

Data table for Figures 3-5, Male cleaners

	Works some early mornings	Works day shift only	Works some afternoons	Works some evenings	Works some night shifts
Do you ever feel unsafe at work?	40.1%	32.6%	34.5%	36.6%	37.0%
Have you ever been harassed on the way to / from work?	16.9%	10.9%	11.3%	13.0%	15.6%
Have you ever been harassed at work?	28.15%	23.9%	29.9%	20.3%	24.0%
Sample size	302	221	177	123	154

Yellow indicates statistically significant difference from same-row value for cleaners who work only day shifts, based on the Chi-Square test for independence with $p < 0.05$

Data table for Figure 6

Country	Percent of respondents working shifts other than the day shift who have felt unsafe at work	Sample size
Tunisia	51.0%	98
Perú	48.6%	70
Italy	46.2%	184
Colombia	44.3%	106
Indonesia	31.8%	66
Finland	31.2%	93
United States	31.1%	74
Germany	29.3%	335
Belgium	28.75	209
New Zealand	26.7%	60
Ireland	25.5%	106
Netherlands	23.9%	159

Data table for Figure 7

How often, if ever, does your work schedule keep you from seeing family and friends?

	Works some early mornings	Works day shift only	Works some afternoons	Works some evenings	Works some night shifts
Very often	10.5%	7.1%	14.5%	18.8%	20.9%
Often	19.7%	18.3%	22.6%	28.6%	24.3%
Sometimes	33.5%	33.7%	32.5%	29.1%	31.5%
Rarely	17.3%	18.5%	13.0%	10.7%	10.9%
Never	19.1%	22.4%	15.5%	12.8%	12.5%
Sample size	1118	750	595	468	321

Yellow indicates statistically significant difference from same-row value for cleaners who work only day shifts, based on the Chi-Square test for independence with $p < 0.05$

Data table for Figure 8

To what extent do you agree with the following statement:

"I have control over my work schedule"

	Works some early mornings	Works day shift only	Works some afternoons	Works some evenings	Works some night shifts
Strongly agree	12.1%	18.4%	9%	8.5%	7.6%
Agree	22.3%	26.2%	23.2%	18.5%	19.7%
Neutral	24.1%	25.0%	23.9%	24.6%	19.4%
Disagree	22.1%	19.8%	20.3%	22.4%	20.0%
Strongly disagree	19.3%	10.6%	23.7%	25.9%	33.1%
Sample size	1107	733	591	459	314

Yellow indicates statistically significant difference from same-row value for cleaners who work only day shifts, based on the Chi-Square test for independence with $p < 0.05$

Data table for Figure 9

Reason	Percentage of workers choosing
I need the hours	32.2%
It doesn't suit my social or family life	25.1%
Day shifts are not available	20.4%
Other shifts pay better	17.0%
I have a second job	11.8%

Appendix B.

Country-level data

The following appendix contains tables detailing various statistics for all of the countries of study in the survey from which there came at least 50 responses.

Germany		
Number of responses	478	
Percent identifying as Female	71.8%	
Percent identifying as immigrants	16.5%	
Percent regularly working night shifts	9.2%	
Percent with multiple jobs	27.8%	
Hours worked per week	More than 40	21.5%
	20 to 40	61.3%
	10 to 20	12.8%
	Less than 10	3.8%

Belgium		
Number of responses	308	
Percent identifying as Female	67.9%	
Percent identifying as immigrants	29.2%	
Percent regularly working night shifts	8.1%	
Percent with multiple jobs	19.8%	
Hours worked per week	More than 40	10.4%
	20 to 40	76.0%
	10 to 20	10.7%
	Less than 10	1.9%

Italy		
Number of responses	203	
Percent identifying as female	81.8%	
Percent identifying as immigrants	27.6%	
Percent regularly working night shifts	13.8%	
Percent with multiple jobs	36.5%	
Hours worked per week	More than 40	7.9%
	20 to 40	63.5%
	10 to 20	22.7%
	Less than 10	3.9%

The Netherlands		
Number of responses	221	
Percent identifying as Female	57.5%	
Percent identifying as immigrants	62.0%	
Percent regularly working night shifts	15.8%	
Percent with multiple jobs	16.7%	
Hours worked per week	More than 40	10.4%
	20 to 40	73.8%
	10 to 20	13.6%
	Less than 10	0.9%

Ireland		
Number of responses	180	
Percent identifying as Female	78.9%	
Percent identifying as immigrants	42.2%	
Percent regularly working night shifts	10.6%	
Percent with multiple jobs	18.3%	
Hours worked per week	More than 40	26.1%
	20 to 40	57.8%
	10 to 20	13.3%
	Less than 10	2.2%

Tunisia		
Number of responses	140	
Percent identifying as Female	85.0%	
Percent identifying as immigrants	40.7%	
Percent regularly working night shifts	21.4%	
Percent with multiple jobs	27.9%	
Hours worked per week	More than 40	45.0%
	20 to 40	50.0%
	10 to 20	2.1%
	Less than 10	2.9%

Finland		
Number of responses	136	
Percent identifying as Female	76.5%	
Percent identifying as immigrants	44.1%	
Percent regularly working night shifts	12.5%	
Percent with multiple jobs	26.5%	
Hours worked per week	More than 40	15.4%
	20 to 40	71.3%
	10 to 20	5.1%
	Less than 10	6.6%

Colombia		
Number of responses	118	
Percent identifying as Female	81.4%	
Percent identifying as immigrants	0.8%	
Percent regularly working night shifts	26.3%	
Percent with multiple jobs	16.9%	
Hours worked per week	More than 40	94.9%
	20 to 40	0%
	10 to 20	0%
	Less than 10	5.1%

Indonesia		
Number of responses	117	
Percent identifying as Female	7.7%	
Percent identifying as immigrants	15.4%	
Percent regularly working night shifts	17.1%	
Percent with multiple jobs	63.2%	
Hours worked per week	More than 40	31.6%
	20 to 40	48.7%
	10 to 20	4.3%
	Less than 10	11.1%

Perú		
Number of responses	97	
Percent identifying as Female	75.3%	
Percent identifying as immigrants	3.1%	
Percent regularly working night shifts	26.8%	
Percent with multiple jobs	10.3%	
Hours worked per week	More than 40	61.9%
	20 to 40	8.2%
	10 to 20	4.1%
	Less than 10	21.6%

United States		
Number of responses	90	
Percent identifying as Female	51.1%	
Percent identifying as immigrants	13.3%	
Percent regularly working night shifts	20.0%	
Percent with multiple jobs	24.4%	
Hours worked per week	More than 40	37.8%
	20 to 40	47.8%
	10 to 20	7.8%
	Less than 10	5.6%

New Zealand		
Number of responses	82	
Percent identifying as Female	80.5%	
Percent identifying as immigrants	34.1%	
Percent regularly working night shifts	14.6%	
Percent with multiple jobs	23.2%	
Hours worked per week	More than 40	29.3%
	20 to 40	54.9%
	10 to 20	13.4%
	Less than 10	2.4%

Argentina		
Number of responses	63	
Percent identifying as Female	50.8%	
Percent identifying as immigrants	6.3%	
Percent regularly working night shifts	7.9%	
Percent with multiple jobs	27.0%	
Hours worked per week	More than 40	55.6%
	20 to 40	15.9%
	10 to 20	4.8%
	Less than 10	22.2%

Panamá		
Number of responses	50	
Percent identifying as Female	84.0%	
Percent identifying as immigrants	0.0%	
Percent regularly working night shifts	8.0%	
Percent with multiple jobs	18.0%	
Hours worked per week	More than 40	40.0%
	20 to 40	30.0%
	10 to 20	0.0%
	Less than 10	20.0%



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