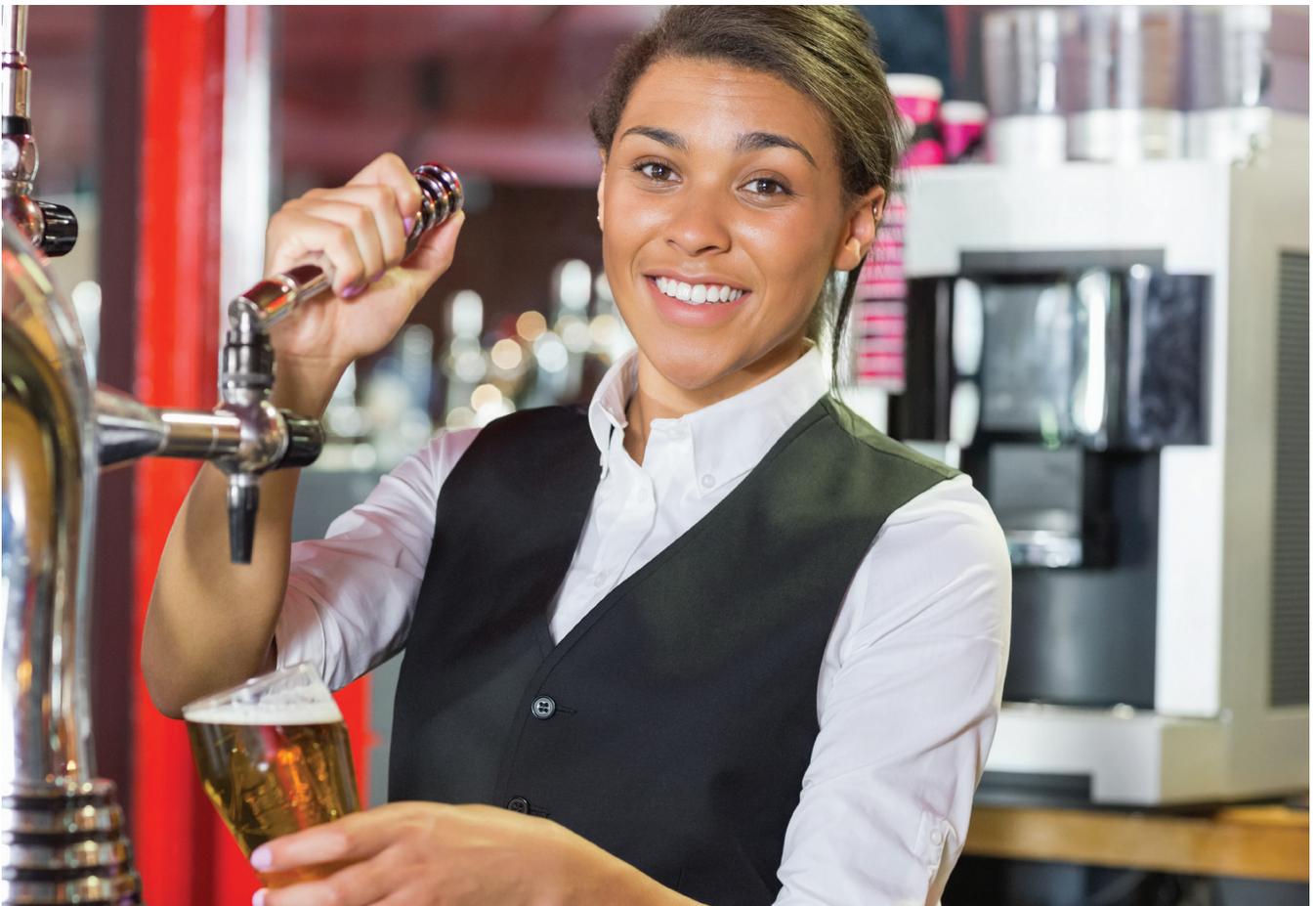


Childcare for London parents with atypical work patterns:

What are the problems and how should we fix them?



“I went for an interview yesterday and I got there and there was loads of people there and I got down to the final eight and everything and she was like ‘yeah because obviously, you’re going to have to do 7 o’clock starts’ and all this like and I’m just thinking well, I just literally can’t do it.”

Many London parents are employed outside of normal 9-5 office hours, or have jobs where the times that they work can change from week to week. These ‘atypical’ work patterns include overtime, shift work, weekend working, zero hours and on-call working.

Many parents who work atypical hours share childcare between them or turn to relatives to provide informal childcare. But this is not always an option available for all families.

They often have trouble finding formal childcare, as nurseries and after-school clubs require a regular commitment and there is little formal childcare that operates outside normal office hours.

This is a particular problem in London, where there are large numbers of people who work atypical hours and big gaps in availability in childcare for this group. This report will set out the issues and outline what can be done to improve provision.

Why is childcare for those with atypical work patterns a particular problem in London?

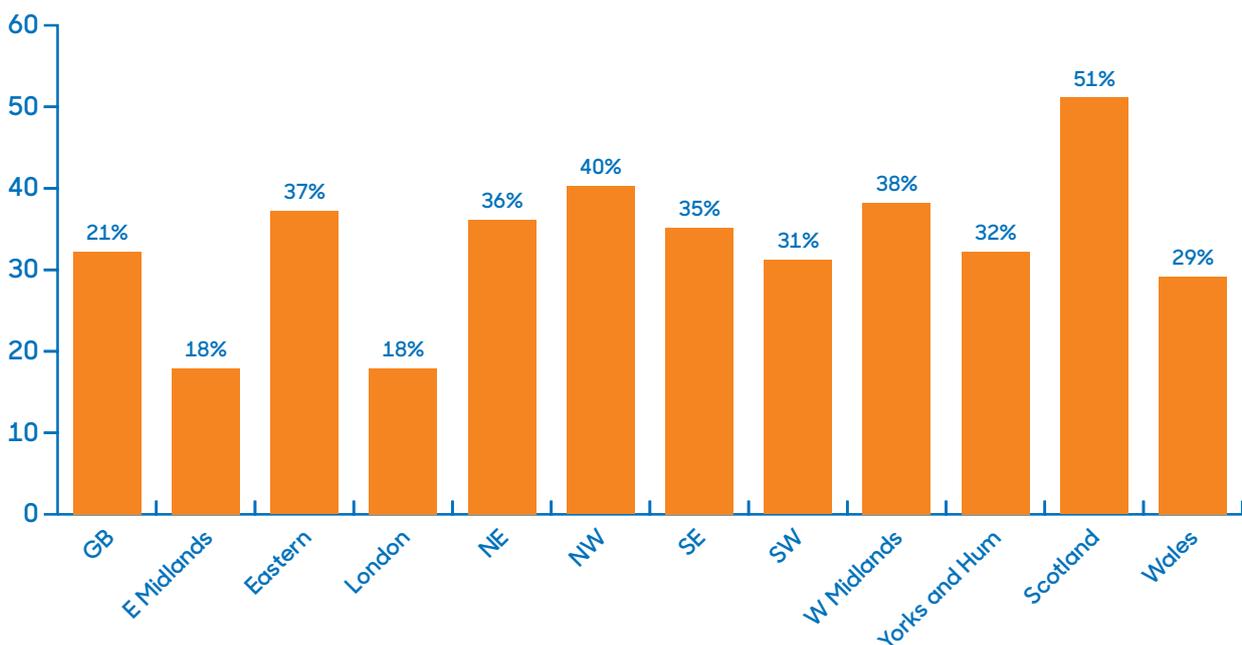
“I'm lucky I have my mum [to help with childcare]. Everybody at work, where I used to work, my friends - everybody says: 'You're so lucky to have your mum'”

Formal childcare includes registered childminders, nurseries, sessional creches, out-of-school and holiday clubs

Informal - unregulated - childcare is usually provided by grandparents, older siblings, other relatives, friends and neighbours. This kind of childcare is less commonly used in London than elsewhere in the country.

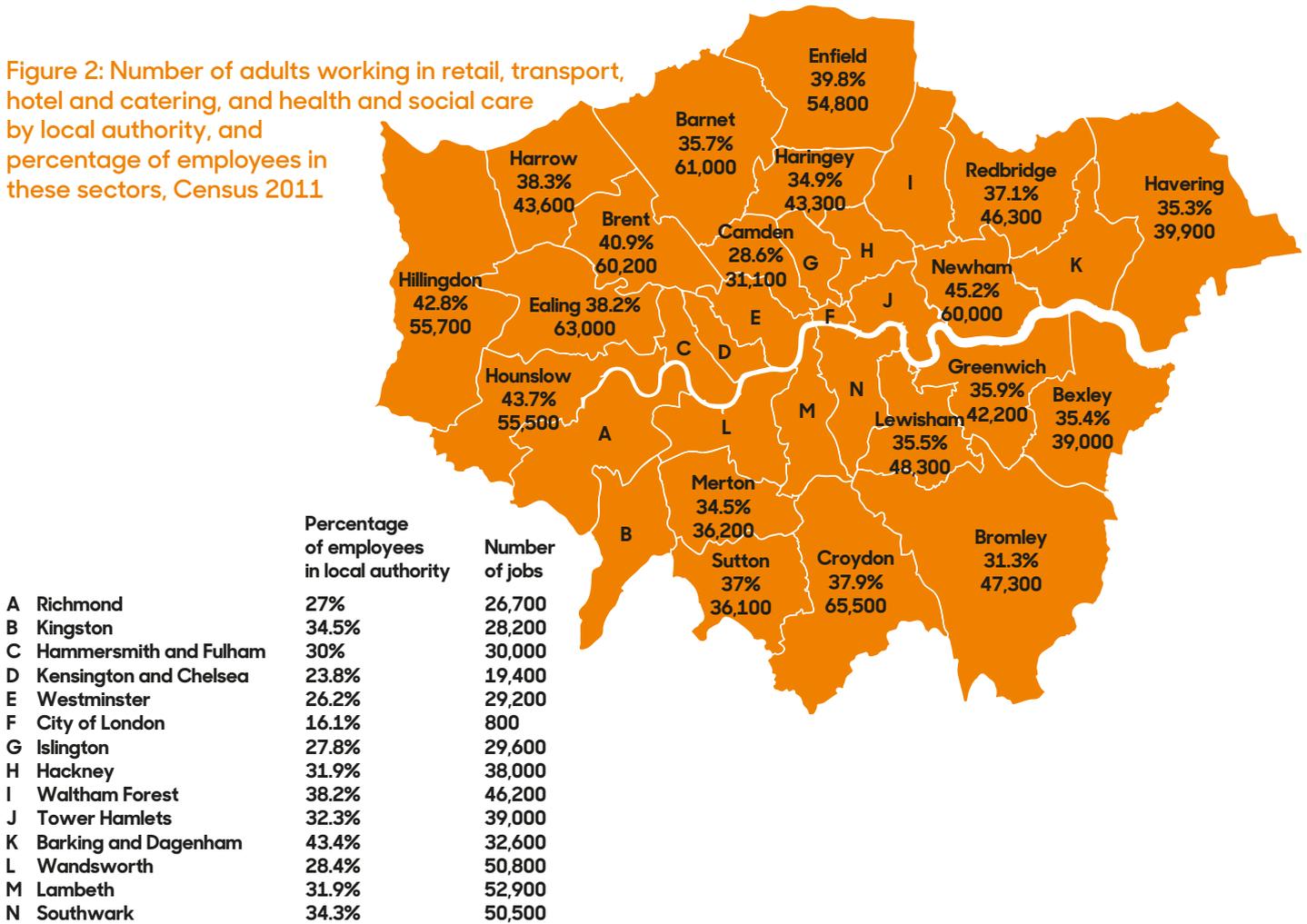
1. **Informal childcare use is lower in London than elsewhere in Britain, yet it is informal childcare that parents with atypical work patterns tend to use a lot.** As a result there is a greater need for formal childcare in London to fill in the gap.
2. **High proportions of Londoners are migrants**, both from overseas, as well as from elsewhere in the UK. Moving home may sever informal childcare arrangements, for example, that provided by grandparents. This means that in London, people are often less able to call on informal childcare than elsewhere in the country (Figure 1).
3. **Some 10 per cent of all households in London are single parent households with dependent children.** Working single parents may not be able to share care with their former partner.
4. **High proportions Londoners work in parts of the economy where atypical work patterns are common.** Some 1.4 million Londoners are employed in the retail, transport, hotel and catering, and health and social care sectors, where jobs frequently involve shift-work outside normal office hours (Figure 2).
5. **Over 17 per cent of working Londoners are now self-employed and may not have the regular hours of work of other employees, an experience shared by those on zero-hours contracts.**
6. **London has been losing flexible forms of childcare at a higher rate than elsewhere in Britain.** Between 2012 and 2014 childminder numbers fell by 13 per cent in London. Childminders are often more flexible and can often meet a parent's request to provide extra hours of care at the beginning or end of the day. There has also been a loss of sessional crèches located in children's centres and community centres. These are often used by parents who are undertaking training or who have a short-term need for childcare.

Figure 1: Percentage of parents using grandparent childcare use in last six months by GB region and nation



N=1,413 parents with sole or joint responsibility for childcare decisions. Source: Rutter, J. and Evans, B. (2012) *Listening to grandparents*, London: Daycare Trust

Figure 2: Number of adults working in retail, transport, hotel and catering, and health and social care by local authority, and percentage of employees in these sectors, Census 2011



Source: Census 2011

What is the impact of parents who work atypical hours not being able to find childcare?

When parents cannot find childcare, it restricts their job opportunities and limits the options they have for arranging work and family life. This is particularly true for parents working atypical hours, who might already have to make arrangements to make their working life and family life fit together.

This can mean that people may have to cut back on the hours they work, or turn to strategies such as 'shift parenting' where parents work at different times and share care between them. Not being able to access childcare can also put pressures on family life as it can make it more challenging for families to spend quality time together.

In addition, lack of childcare for parents who work atypical hours can have a cost for the economy – it can prevent people from working or studying, with a cost to the economy of the capital.

For people in low paid professions or on zero hours contracts, not being able to find childcare and being unable to take on more hours of work can have an especially significant impact. For people to be able to 'get ahead' by taking on more work or getting a new job, being able to access childcare outside of regular office hours is vital.

“I have asked my boss if I can change my hours to 9.00am–5.00pm but this does not look likely. I have looked around for other jobs with better hours but have not found much.”

What can local authorities do to help parents with atypical work patterns?

The Childcare Act 2006 requires that local authorities ensure that there is sufficient childcare, as far as is reasonable practical, for working parents, or parents who are studying or training for employment. In order to ensure they have sufficient childcare, local authorities need to know about any gaps they might have.

In England the Childcare Act 2006 and its statutory guidance require local authorities to audit their supply of childcare and to see that it satisfies parental demand. This audit has to be undertaken every year and include an action plan to show how gaps will be filled. It should make "specific reference to how [local authorities] are ensuring that there is sufficient childcare available to meet the needs of: disabled children; children from families in receipt of Working Tax Credit or Universal Credit; children with parents who work irregular hours" (Department for Education, 2014).

But half (17 out of 33) of local authorities in London have not undertaken these annual reports since 2011. This means that they do not have the knowledge to fill gaps. Even if a childcare sufficiency reports is undertaken, the local authority may not consider the needs of parents with atypical work patterns.

Yet there is good practice in London and local authorities that are thinking about the needs of parents with atypical work pattern. They have worked with childcare providers and employers to ensure that:

- ▶ Nurseries, breakfast clubs and holiday childcare are open by 7.30am and stay open until 7pm where there is demand.
- ▶ There are workplace nurseries in places that employ a large number of staff who work outside normal office hours, for example, hospitals, shopping centres and airports.
- ▶ There is enough sessional crèche provision for parents with irregular work patterns.
- ▶ New childminders are recruited to provide care.
- ▶ Home-based childcare provided by Ofsted-registered carers.

In some areas, private childcare providers and some public sector organisations run registered 'at home' childcare services. Here, Ofsted-registered provide childcare in the family home. The difference between them and nannies is that the carers are registered with Ofsted, so low income parents are able to apply for the childcare element of Working Tax Credit/Universal Credit to pay for some of the care. The organisation that runs the service – a company, hospital or local authority – brokers the relationship between parent and the carer, or in some cases, employs the carer directly. In London, Brent Council has recently set up an 'at home' childcare scheme and a number of children's centres in Hammersmith and Fulham employ childminders who provide care in the family home for those who need it outside normal office hours. The Family and Childcare Trust would like to see these examples extended across London.

“I work three days a week but they won't give me set days – they used to but now they won't. It's only my immediate manager that tries to sort it out for me, but basically I have to work any three days”

Recommendations

- ▶ Local authorities should set up at-home childcare services for parents who work outside normal office hours, where Ofsted-registered carers work in the family home.
- ▶ Local authorities should have a strategy for sessional crèche provision to help parents who have irregular work patterns or those who are undertaking training.
- ▶ All local authorities should fulfil the obligations set out in the Childcare Act 2006 to ensure sufficient childcare for working parents, including those with atypical work patterns.
- ▶ The Department for Education, local authorities and the new childminder agencies should take action to keep childminders in the profession, which might include offering small grants for equipment, free training and paying for childminder's registration.
- ▶ The Department for Education should set aside grant funding to increase the amount of formal childcare for parents with atypical work patterns. This grant could be used to help businesses set up workplace nurseries, prioritising employers who staff are obliged to work outside normal office hours. The grant could also be used to set up 'at home' childcare services.