

Supporting Sleep Health: The Key to Occupational Well- being and Productivity

The Workplace Sleep Coach 2024

Transforming Workplace Productivity

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Foreword




Thank you for taking the time to read our research paper and taking an interest in a topic that is so important, yet underestimated, underrepresented and underreported, sleep.

Our work is all backed by evidence and fuelled by passion, and I hope you too will see the benefits in helping improve sleep amongst your workforce, and making sleep a priority for 2025.

I would like to personally thank Libby Nielson and Sophie Webb, my 2 interns from the University of Chester, who without their dedication and support, this research paper would not have been possible.

Nicole Ratcliffe

Award Winning Family Sleep Coach

<https://www.theworkplacesleepcoach.com/> 

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At The Workplace Sleep Coach, we have dedicated our research to understanding the impact of sleep deprivation on working parents, and how this translates into the workplace. With a specialised background in improving sleep patterns for parents and their children, we empower families with knowledge that enhances home life and translates into tangible benefits for employers. Our efforts aim to increase awareness, transform mindsets around sleep, and foster a holistic improvement in sleep quality for working parents.

With over 60% of new parents wishing they had been more prepared for the impact a child would have on their lives, we provide ongoing sleep support after birth to ensure that parents are well-equipped to re-enter the workplace efficiently contributing to a more balanced and successful return to work.

By providing employees with strategies to adopt positive sleep habits, managers guidance on recognising sleep issues within their teams, and implementing supportive workplace policies and practices, we aim to

increase loyalty, enhance employee retention, generate significant cost savings for businesses and play a part in closing the gender gap.

In today's competitive job market, family-friendly policies are essential for attracting top talent. Our expertise enables companies to become desirable employers, known for their supportive environments and commitment to employee well-being. Through our research and practical interventions, we highlight the critical importance of sleep and its profound impact on workplace efficiency and employee health.



Nicole Ratcliffe



1. Introduction and Context

Introduction and Context

“Sleep Deprivation: The condition of not having enough sleep; it can be chronic or acute and leads to impaired physical and cognitive function.”

Sleep is fundamental to human health and productivity, yet in today's fast-paced work environment, many struggle to get adequate rest. We spend about one-third of our lives asleep, yet good sleep practices are often overlooked in discussions about health and well-being. More than **43% of workers are sleep-deprived**, with working parents and caregivers facing unique challenges. Night time awakenings and fragmented sleep means 95% of new parents achieve less than the recommended amount of sleep each night, and **59% of parents will still experience sleep deprivation up to six years later**.

With 56% of women and 44% of men juggling parenthood alongside their careers, sleep deprivation among working parents has become a widespread, yet often underreported, issue across many businesses.

Excising stereotypes and a lack of current workplace support or understanding has led to 30% of mothers experiencing

discrimination upon returning to work, with 40% of employers admitting they are generally wary of hiring women of childbearing age. As a result, **54,000 new parents choose to leave the workforce each year in the UK alone**.

This situation not only incurs high replacement costs for businesses but unsupported parents returning to work may suffer from reduced productivity, efficiency, interpersonal relationships, and long-term health, creating substantial individual and organisational challenges, according to the British Society of Lifestyle Medicine. This makes financial losses through presenteeism, absenteeism and replacement of up to **£50 billion annually** across all UK employers.

→ *1 in 3*

1 in 3 employees experience symptoms of Chronic Insomnia



Financial Impact

Based on research from multiple sleep health organisations*, we estimate that sleep deprivation costs UK employers up to £50 billion annually (approximately 1.86% of its GDP). This includes presenteeism and absenteeism costs of around £360 million with 1.65 million lost working hours, and turnover costs of around £9 billion. Up to \$680 Billion Is Lost Each Year Across Five OECD Countries* due to insufficient sleep.

The costs to employers of poor sleep in the workplace are substantial. Using conservative assumptions from Gravitare HR, we estimate a total annual cost to businesses of up to **£1035 per person** per annum based on the definition that workplace productivity as the output of resources in relation to the input, as defined by the Mental Health Foundation at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE).

There are also other indirect costs to employers of sleep deprivation, such as the adverse impact on creativity, innovation, employee safety and other employee relationships.

Classification

The UK's Office for National Statistics (ONS) employs diverse methods to analyse business data and productivity. While they use the Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) system to categorize businesses by their economic activities (such as manufacturing, retail, or

£1035 per person



(0-9 Employees)

Potential Annual Loss

Range **£0-£9,315**



(10-49 Employees)

Potential Annual Loss

Range **£10,350 - £50,715**



(50-249 Employees)

Potential Annual Loss

Range **£51,750 - £257,715**



(250+ Employees)

Potential Annual Loss

Range **£258,750 and above**

£360 ROI for self help programs, and £15.80 ROI for parenting programs

construction), they also classify businesses by size. The ONS calculates productivity measures including output per worker and output per hour worked.

Employee Turnover

The true cost of employee turnover involves much more than just recruiting-related expenses. In fact, when an employee leaves, it can cost from **one-half to two times that worker's annual salary** to replace them.

There are many reasons an employee may leave a business, with indirect ties to sleep deprivation. Recent advances in technology and an increased understanding of sleep's critical role in overall health underscore the need for a comprehensive approach to sleep health in the workplace.

Not only does sleep impact productivity in the workplace, the impact of sleep deprivation on workplace safety and performance is significant, with

Projected Economic Losses

*National Sleep Foundation (NSF), Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), RAND, Office for National Statistics (ONS)

*Statistics based primarily on U.S., Canada, UK, Germany, Japan and others

seventeen hours of wakefulness impairing cognitive function as much as consuming two glasses of wine, while 24 hours without sleep is comparable to the UK legal limit for driving. This impairment increases workplace accidents, with highly fatigued workers being **70% more likely to be involved in incidents** than their well-rested counterparts.



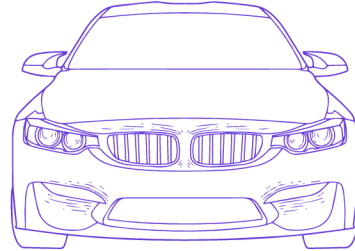
With poor sleep three or more times a week impairing cognitive function by up to 13%, these dangers extend to road safety. With 68% of the UK population driving to work, drivers getting six to seven hours of sleep are 1.3 times more likely to crash, while those with five to six hours face 1.9 times the risk. Four to five hours of sleep increases crash risk by 4.3 times, and less than four hours makes it 11.5 times more likely. Alarming, over **16% of fatal crashes involve a drowsy driver, with estimates it could potentially be as high as 40%.**

“Health is too important to be left solely to doctors. Health is related not only to access to technical solutions but the nature of society.” – Professor Michael Marmot

Increased accidents due to sleep deprivation can lead to higher insurance costs, legal issues, and loss of morale, creating low job satisfaction and burnout. These conditions endanger lives and result in losing skilled workers, either through accidents or because employees leave voluntarily in search of less stressful environments and better work-life balance

→ *1 in 8*

1 in 8 (13%) UK drivers report having fallen asleep while driving, while 37% have felt scared they would fall asleep at the wheel.



“There is strong evidence that less than five hours sleep is associated with unsafe driving.” – Dr Clare Anderson

Proposed Research

By analysing this data and drawing from personal experiences in the field, Nicole Ratcliffe at The Workplace Sleep Coach, in partnership with the University of Chester, investigated the impact of family-friendly employers on employee well-being. This involved examining current well-being practices supporting families and evaluating how these practices translate into overall employee benefits. The study aimed to identify effective strategies that employers can implement to mitigate the negative effects of sleep deprivation and enhance job satisfaction.



2. Our Investigation

Our Investigation

Survey Results

Three significant themes emerged when reviewing the responses to our survey: Investigating the impact of family-friendly employers on employee wellbeing

Sleep difficulties:

Only **half** of the participants slept between 6-8 hours per night.

Only **17%** of participants report feeling well rested when they wake in the morning.

The most common reasons for sleep difficulties were:

- Having children with disturbed sleep (**69%**)
- Having to work late (**29%**)
- Being too worried to switch off (**21%**)
- Having to stay up late to do housework (**9%**)

Stress in the workplace

57% of participants feel mentally exhausted while at work.

61% of participants feel that there is more work than they are practically capable of completing.

51% of participants feel that their work stresses follow them home at the end of the day.

41% of participants feel that they are under too much pressure to succeed in work.

Lack of support in the workplace:

Only **67%** of participants feel that their employer is understanding in exceptional circumstances.

32% of participants never have discussions with their employer about their wellbeing.

34% of participants dread having to discuss any issues with their employer.

Only **50%** of participants feel that they can be honest with their employer about their needs and wellbeing.

Only **30%** of participants know where to find networks of support in the workplace.

Only **52%** of participants feel that there is adequate support for parents and carers in the workplace.

The bigger picture...

The results found in our survey are not just a snapshot of time. They represent a future harm that may be suffered by both employees and businesses. Further statistical analysis of our survey results as well as detailed secondary research has revealed the impacts that the beforementioned statistics could have in the future:

The Cost to the Employee:

As demonstrated by our survey, a significant proportion of our participants were struggling with sleep quality, stress in the workplace and a lack of support in work. However, further statistical analysis (as detailed in Appendix 2) has revealed the following associations:

Poorer sleep quality is associated with:

- Higher risk of burnout
- Higher anxiety scores
- Higher depression scores
- More pressure in the workplace
- Poorer overall wellbeing

When participants were asked to rate the quality of the family friendly policies in their workplace, the following relationships were found:

Higher quality of family friendly policies was associated with:

- Lower risk of burnout
- Lower anxiety scores
- Lower depression scores
- Better overall wellbeing
- Better social support in the workplace
- Higher job satisfaction

Similarly, the higher the number of family friendly policies that employees were provided with was associated with:

- Lower risk of burnout
- Lower depression scores
- Better quality social support in the workplace
- Better overall wellbeing
- Better job satisfaction

The Cost to the Business:

Although mental health difficulties and poor sleep quality can be influenced by many factors outside of the workplace, our survey has demonstrated that the less a business supports their employee's wellbeing, the more this may cause detriment to the business itself.

Employers that have fewer and poorer quality of family friendly policies are also more likely to be rated to have lower wellbeing policies for their employees.

Our analysis has found that poorer wellbeing in employees (including poor sleep quality, high levels of pressure in the workplace and high levels of burnout, anxiety and depression) has been associated with the following:

- Poorer job satisfaction
- Higher numbers of employee absences
- Lower tenure

Who is most at risk of suffering from mental health difficulties in the workplace?

As part of our data analysis, we looked at the different groups of people who answered our survey, to determine if there were any differences in employee wellbeing. We found that the following factors represented a higher quantity of employees with the following:

<p>Those who are working class:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poorer social relationships in the workplace • Higher risk of burnout • Poorer overall wellbeing • Poorer sleep quality
<p>Those who work in person (as opposed to hybrid or remotely)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poorer social relationships in the workplace • Lower job satisfaction • Poorer quality of family friendly policies • Poorer quality of wellbeing support
<p>Those who are younger:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher risk of burnout • Higher depression scores • Poorer job satisfaction • Lower tenure
<p>Those who work in the business, property, education, hospitality, retail and social care sectors</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poorer overall wellbeing • Poorer job satisfaction • More pressure in the workplace • Lower tenure • Higher number of absences • Poorer quality family friendly policies • Poorer quality of wellbeing support

And the parents?

Further statistical analysis was conducted using the results of our questionnaire to look at whether there was a significant difference in the scores provided by participants who had children, compared to those who didn't have children.

Sleep quality

Parents, compared to non-parents, reported poorer quality of sleep. Upon further analysis, this score did not differ depending on the amount of children that participants had.

Depression, burnout and overall wellbeing

Parents, compared to non-parents, reported more depression and poorer overall wellbeing. Parents also scored higher on risk of burnout. Upon further analysis, this score was significantly higher in first-time parents with only one child for all of the above factors.

Anxiety

Parents, compared to non-parents, reported more anxiety. In particular, parents who had between 1-2 children reported significantly more anxiety than those without children and those with more than 2 children.

Pressure in the workplace

Parents, compared with non parents, reported significantly higher levels of pressure in the workplace. Upon further analysis, this increased alongside the amount of children each participant had; parents with more than 2 children reported the most pressure, with parents of two children reporting the second-most amount of pressure in the workplace.

What does this tell us?

These results show us that working parents are significantly at risk of developing burnout or displaying signs of mental illness, something which paints a concerning picture for the future of our employees, when combined with the risk factors on the previous page. Although working parents are 14% more likely to stay employed for a longer period of time with the same employer, these results display that this loyalty is being underappreciated by their employers. Parents with two or more children are the most likely to have a higher tenure, however, they also report experiencing the most pressure in the workplace. This paradox further demonstrates how a secure support network in the workplace can benefit the lives, productivity and morale of employees, particularly those like working parents or working carers, who may require more support, flexibility and understanding.



3. The future for working parents

Hear from the employees

How can employers help working parents thrive in the workplace?

Part of our research has focused on directly asking our participants what could be done to support working parents, as well as to improve morale and productivity in the workplace. When asked what could be done, these were our participants' unprompted free-written answers:

To support working parents:

Our participants suggested that the following arrangements could help to improve the support given to working parents by their employers:

- **More flexibility when working (35%)** - participants often reported that a lack of flexibility in their working hours made it difficult for them to care for their children (e.g. collecting them from school, attending school events and spending quality time with their children).
- **A remote/ hybrid aspect to working (14%)** - participants indicated that they often felt that many duties (such as attending meetings) could be conducted remotely.
- **A more understanding workplace culture (12%)** - participants reported feeling judged in the workplace, due to having to take time off to care for their children, stating that they didn't feel that their workplace understood why they had to prioritise their children over their attendance in work.
- **Better education of managers (9%)** - participants stated that they feel that managers need to receive more training regarding how to support and understand the needs of working parents.
- **Childcare days/ paid carers leave (9%)** - participants felt that they were spending the majority of their annual leave caring for their children (for example, attending appointments or taking care of them if they were ill), and felt that they were unable to spend their annual leave days as freely as childless employees or employees without caring responsibilities.

To improve staff morale and productivity:

Our participants suggested that the following arrangements could help to improve staff morale and productivity in their workplace:

- **Addressing 'toxic' management (18%)** - participants felt that they were subjected to the control of a 'toxic' management team, and mentioned concerns such as policies not being correctly enforced and managers appearing to not care about their team or their needs.
- **Making workloads manageable and sensible (16%)** - participants reported feeling frequently overworked and subjected to an intense amount of pressure in the workplace.
- **Creating a more positive working environment (15%)** - participants stated that instating team building days and socials (11%) and more staff appreciation (10%) would help them to feel more positive and productive in work.
- **Improving the training and quantity of staff (10%)** - participants reported feeling that they were too understaffed, when considering the deadlines they were subjected to, as well as many staff members being undertrained in their field, creating a more intense level of pressure.
- **Providing more wellbeing support (10%)** - participants stated that being provided with more wellbeing support would help them to feel more positive towards their workplace and would increase their overall work ethic and productivity.

External Stress Factors and Sleep Deprivation

External societal stressors are increasingly affecting sleep patterns and overall well-being, with concerning trends likely to exacerbate sleep-related issues among employees in the future.



Recent data reveals that 26% of individuals feel they don't earn enough to maintain a decent standard of living, while **19% struggle to make ends meet due to income volatility**, and almost one-third (29%) express concern about their personal debt levels. These financial pressures, compounded by current political and economic conditions such as the rising cost of living and restrictive regulations, have further impacted individual well-being, worsening stress and mental health and fatigue, making adequate sleep even more elusive.

The severity of this issue is underscored by nationwide data collected by MIND, which indicates a 22% surge in people seeking support in 2023 alone., with people presenting with insomnia being 10 to 17 times more likely than those without insomnia to experience clinically significant levels of depression and anxiety.

Women Employees: A Closer Look

Sleep deprivation challenges disproportionately affect working parents, with 69% of parents in our investigation reporting having children with disturbed sleep as their primary reason for feeling fatigue. These individuals often rush back to work prematurely due to financial constraints.

This is particularly acute for new mothers. A 2017 National Childbirth Trust study found that half of women experiencing physical and emotional wellbeing concerns during or after pregnancy neither had their needs identified nor received treatment. Barriers included **fear of being seen as incapable (46%)** and embarrassment (37%). Despite NHS efforts to address these issues through additional health checks, a 2021 NCT survey showed little improvement, with 25% of new mothers reporting no inquiries about their wellbeing.

Employees exhibiting symptoms of fatigue are 35% more likely to take sick leave within the following 12 months.

These findings underscore a critical gap in supporting working parents' sleep health, potentially impacting both personal well-being and workplace productivity. The pressure to return to work quickly, combined with inadequate support for new parents, creates an environment for sleep deprivation and its associated risks in the workplace

As these societal pressures mount, the importance of addressing sleep deprivation becomes even more critical, not just for

individual well-being but for overall workplace productivity and safety. The interconnected nature of these issues highlights the urgent need for comprehensive strategies that address both sleep health and the underlying societal stressors in the workplace

Impact of Unseen Labour

In addition, the distribution of domestic responsibilities reveals a significant gender disparity, with women shouldering a disproportionate share of household and caregiving duties compared to men. This imbalance is particularly pronounced among those in leadership positions.

“Sleep is a critical part of any treatment plan for all postpartum conditions. Medications, therapy, and a support network are important, but women need sleep to fully recover.”
 Dr. Carly Snyder,
 Reproductive and Perinatal
 Psychiatrist

“We know that up to 80 percent of people with mental health disorders have problems with falling asleep,” says CAMH psychiatrist and sleep disorder specialist Dr. Michael Mak

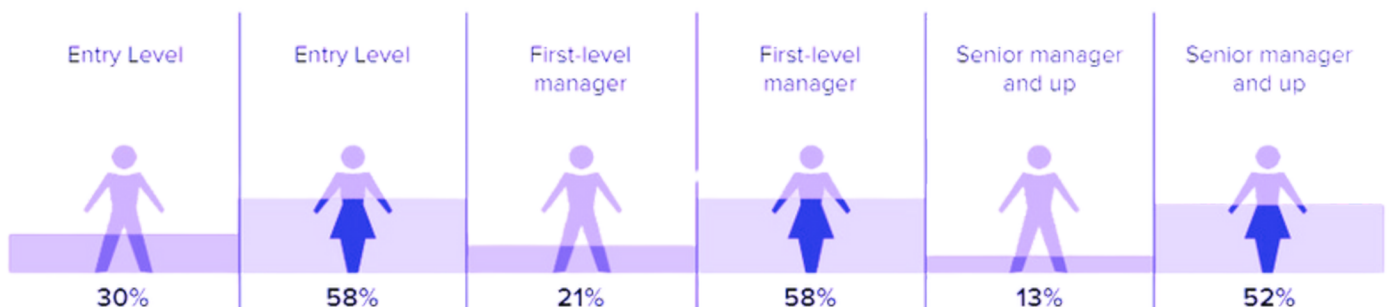
This disparity increases mothers stress,... and reducing the quality sleep they receive at night. It has been estimated in general women carry out **60% more unpaid work than men.**

To better understand the real-life impact of these challenges, we gathered quotes from parents sharing their personal experiences with sleep deprivation and its effects on their daily lives



Career Advancement and Domestic Labor:

% of men and women at different levels who are responsible for most or all of their family's housework and/or childcare



Nicole Ratcliffe

Voices of Working Parents

Part of our research has focused on directly asking our participants what could be done to support working parents, as well as to improve morale and productivity in the workplace. Below are the findings:

'**We use all of our leave for childcare**, so we don't end up getting a break... I'm expected to work and care for my children at the same time.'

'Top managers need to spend more time in lower roles in order to understand and empathise. Employees respect managers' decisions if they have worn their shoes.'

'Get rid of the one size fits all rule. Actually be an ambassador for flexible and hybrid working, rather than going back to the 80s'

'They need to first acknowledge that **working parents need support** - this is studiously ignored at the moment. There is very much a 'well everyone has kids' attitude.'

'We have seen the best productivity and profits when employees have been allowed to have more say on how things are done within their team.'

'**Spend time with people as individuals not resources.**'

Contact Us

Discover expert advice on workplace wellness and productivity through improving sleep hygiene and supporting workplaces to close the gender gap at The Workplace Sleep Coach.

Whether you are interested in a one off lunch and learn through to bespoke sleep wellness programmes, we can help.



Book your discovery call today and join the sleep revolution.



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Please contact us for further reading. Nicole has also published the following;
Breaking the Silence: Revealing the Truth about Parenting and the Workplace
Case Study - Atlanta Group - The Impact of Sleep Coaching in the Workplace

Nicole Ratcliffe



4. Appendix and References

Appendix 1: Survey methodology

The survey that is referenced in this report was created, distributed and analysed by the research team at The Workplace Sleep Coach.



SURVEY DESIGN

*The variables of anxiety and depression (which were also used to create an 'overall wellbeing' score, were measured using the Hospital Anxiety Depression Scale (HADS). The variable of burnout was measured using the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI).

The survey was created in January 2024. The questions used were designed to collect data on the following:

1. Participant demographics (including employment sector and type of employment contract)
2. Participants' wellbeing, sleep quality and risk of burnout.*
3. Participants' job satisfaction
4. The quality of family friendly policies in the participant's workplace.

A variety of question types were used in order to gain the optimal range of data. For this reason, a mixture of 5 point Likert Scales, other closed question types and open questions were used in the design of the survey.



SURVEY DISTRIBUTION

We began the process of survey distribution in February 2024. Between this time and May 2024, the survey was repeatedly reposted and shared on a variety of social media sites including:

- LinkedIn
- Reddit
- Facebook

This allowed us to gain 466 participants for our survey.

Nicole Ratcliffe

Appendix 2: Data analysis

The results from the survey were uploaded into SPSS (a statistics software) and a variety of data analysis was conducted to obtain our results.



SECTION 1:

The information in the first section of the 'Bigger picture' segment was gained by running either Spearman's or Pearson's correlations in SPSS. All of the correlations reported had a significance level of at least $p = .05$.

SECTION 2 & 3:

The information in the second and third sections of the 'bigger picture' segment was gained by running one way ANOVAs (or independent samples t tests for the comparison between 'parents' and 'non parents' in the third section). All of the statistics reported had a significance level of at least $p = .05$.



The statistics presented on the first page of the 'hear from the employees' segment were gained by conducting a content analysis of 3 open questions, in order to quantify all qualitative responses provided by participants.

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British Sleep Society
British Paediatric
Sleep Society
UK Multidisciplinary Sleep Professionals