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**The Unorganised Worker: Problems at Work, Routes to Support and Views
on Representation**

The Unrepresented Worker Survey 2004

**Who experiences problems at work, what problems do they experience,
what do they do about them and what happens as a result?**

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Executive summary

This report is based on a survey, the Unrepresented Worker Survey (URWS), conducted in 2004 of 501 low-paid, non-unionised workers who had experienced problems at work in the previous three years.

Before selecting only those who earned below the median and were not unionised, the survey found that almost half of those contacted reported experiencing a problem at work in the previous three years. This is similar to the 42 per cent having had a problem in the previous five years found in a recent government commissioned study (Casebourne *et al.* 2006) and suggests that problems at work are widespread in the British workforce.

The majority of the sample, 58 per cent, had never been union members, 34 per cent had been members at some time and 6 per cent were members when they had their problems, but had no union recognition or representation.

The most common problem areas were pay, work relations, especially stress and bullying and workload (for around a third of the sample) and job security and working hours (for a quarter or more). Most workers experienced multiple problems. The three most common *specific* problems within each problem area were: *stress* (24 per cent of all respondents), *being given too much work without enough time* (20 per cent of respondents) and *management taking advantage and bullying me* (18.8 per cent of the sample). These problems indicate a working environment for between a fifth and a quarter of vulnerable non-unionised workers of work intensification and management bullying. Just over half of respondents felt that one or more of their problems were an infringement of their rights.

The majority (61 per cent) took advice about their main problem as soon as it started. Women, disabled workers and those who perceived their rights to have been violated were more likely to have sought advice. Several sources of advice were sought, with a third approaching managers and friends and work colleagues. A significant minority sought help from Citizens' Advice (13 per cent), but few approached trade unions, ACAS or Law Centres (5, 3 and 1 per cent respectively). Workers were most strongly influenced by the advice of friends or colleagues (20 per cent), followed by family and friends (16 per cent). Managers had greatest influence for only a tenth of respondents. Over half were advised to seek managers informally and only 23 per cent to use the grievance procedure, with only 13.7 per cent receiving that advice from line managers. A little over half of respondent found it easy or very easy to obtain advice, but carers, the disabled, ethnic minorities and those who felt that their problem represented a violation of their rights were less likely to have found it easy to get advice.

Eighty six per cent of workers with problems took action to try to resolve them – a finding which contradicts the common assumption that low-paid, non-unionised workers with problems at work simply leave or remain passive. Most attempted informal resolution within the workplace and very few used recourse to the law.

The most common form of action was to make an informal approach to a line manager or senior manager (69 and 43 per cent of the sample respectively). Only 12 per cent used the formal grievance procedure and a mere 2 per cent began Employment Tribunal application. Acting with external support was rare: 9 per cent of the sample went to a Citizens Advice Bureau, 6 per cent approached a trade union, and 8 per cent sought help from friends and family.

A noticeable and significant finding was that the second most frequent type of action after approaching managers was joining with co-workers 'who shared the same concerns to get together as a group to pursue their claims' (24 per cent of the sample, 28 per cent of those who took action). This figure rose to 55 per cent of the sample, after respondents were later asked if their problems were shared by others and if so, whether they acted to resolve them.

This result indicates that worker collectivism persists despite the emphasis on individualism at work through Human Resource Management and wider employment policies and ideology.

For most (79 per cent) of those who participated in informal collective action, this meant discussing what to do about the shared problem with co-workers. However, almost a fifth (19 per cent) went as a group to management, and a further 13 per cent arranged a 'group meeting to discuss what we could do'. Attempts by workers to exercise collective power, for example by withholding their labour, were very rare.

Although only 6 per cent of respondents approached a union for help with their problem, when asked later in the questionnaire about their views on unions, 52 per cent believed that a union could have helped them resolve their problem and 40 per cent would join one as a result of their problem.

A key finding was that, despite attempts at workplace resolution, almost half (47 per cent) had no conclusion at all to these endeavours. Of the 38 per cent who had any result, only half were satisfied. Over the whole sample this meant that only 16 per cent of vulnerable workers with problems at work and 18.6 per cent of those who tried to take steps to resolve them had a satisfactory outcome.

Within the previous three years of employment to which the survey referred, 58 per cent of the sample reported problems in the current job and 42 per cent referred to problems in a previous job (16 per cent to problems in the most recent job and 26 per cent in a job previous to that). Thus, labour turnover was generally high. It is important to note, however, that the same proportions (86 per cent) of those who had quit their job and of those who were in the current one had taken action to resolve their problem. This shows that in general, workers do not leave a job with difficulties without first trying to resolve them. However, quit rates were 65 per cent higher for respondents who failed to achieve a satisfactory resolution to their problem than they were for respondents who had achieved a satisfactory outcome.

Satisfactory resolution was more likely if the problem concerned pay or work relations, but less likely if workers felt that their problem breached their rights.

There was little relationship between the form of action taken and satisfactory resolution, although respondents who went to trade unions and Citizens' Advice Bureaux were less likely to achieve satisfactory resolutions. This suggests that more severe problems, perceived to breach rights or require outside intervention, were even less likely to reach satisfactory settlement.

In workplaces with regular consultation and communication between employees and management, problems were more likely to be resolved, and to be resolved satisfactorily. However, respondents who worked in a workplace with a formal grievance procedure were not significantly more likely to get a conclusion or a satisfactory resolution than those who worked in a workplace without such a procedure, although they had a lower probability of quitting. While causality cannot be inferred from this, the result suggests that grievance procedures serve managers better than they serve workers in that workers remain in their jobs despite poor problem resolution.

Worker vulnerability in this survey was defined in terms of non-unionisation and earning below median pay. If a narrower definition of vulnerable workers were used, such as the TUC calculation of one-in-five employees, based on the more financially disadvantaged bottom third of the income distribution and non-coverage by collective agreements (TUC 2006: 7), it is likely that the resolution-rate would be even poorer than that found in this study. Furthermore, young workers, probably the least informed and most insecure, were under-represented in the URWS sample. In other words, our results on outcomes err, if anything, on the optimistic side.

1. Introduction

The issue of 'vulnerable employment' has gained prominence in government discourse in the wake of tragedies, such as the drowning of eighteen exploited Chinese migrant cockle-pickers in Morecambe Bay in February 2004 (*Guardian* February 7 2004). It has become part of the public policy agenda since the 'Warwick Agreement' between trade unions and the Labour Party, which mentioned vulnerable employment as an area on which the government would take action and led to the 2006 parliamentary policy statement, 'Success at Work: Protecting vulnerable workers, supporting good employers' (DTI 2006). Tragedies like Morecambe Bay have led to an increasing awareness of the plight of migrant workers in particular areas of the economy. However, vulnerable employment is not confined to migrant workers (although they may be amongst the most vulnerable), but a pervasive feature of the modern British labour market. Neo-liberalism has dominated British policies since the 1980s, with financial performance, shareholder demands and private sector competition and values pervading every sector, including public service provision. The current New Labour government remains committed to maintaining a 'flexible' labour force, and although it has enacted new individual employment rights, many European employment Directives have been restrictively applied and the preference remains for voluntary employer codes of practice to statutory employment regulation (Smith and Morton 2001; 2006).

Collective regulation of the employment relationship was eroded in the 1980s and 1990s (Smith and Morton 1993), leading to the 'individualisation' of the employment relationship. Not only have union membership and coverage declined, but for those covered by collective bargaining, its depth and scope has weakened (Brown *et al.* 1998). However, unions retain a role in maintaining statutory individual rights (Brown *et al.* 2000), even though this activity may conflict with the traditional function of collective bargaining (Colling 2006). Thus, although unionised workers have become more vulnerable to unilateral employer prerogative with the weakening of union power, they have more protection than the growing numbers of the non-unionised.

For these, the asymmetry of the capitalist employment relationship between employee and employer is mitigated only by statutory individual rights, without the benefit either of union support or a statutory enforcement body. Workers without employee status are further disadvantaged by not being covered by unfair dismissal laws. Hence, the focus of this study is on these non-unionised employees and workers - the majority of Britain's labour force. UK union density, while appearing to stabilise in recent years, continues to decline: in 2006 28.4 per cent of employees were union members, down 0.6 percentage points from 2005. In the private sector, membership fell by the same amount to just 16.6 per cent (Grainger and Crowther 2007: 1). For the past decade, only a third of UK employees have been covered by collective agreements on pay, and in the private sector, which comprises 80 per cent of employment (Labour Market Trends 2006), only 19.6 per cent (Grainger and Crowther 2007: 37).

The government recently defined vulnerability as a function of the risk of adverse treatment and capacity to defend ones self against it. It maintains that a vulnerable worker is 'someone working in an environment where the risk of being denied employment rights is high and who does not have the capacity or means to protect themselves from that abuse. Both factors need to be present. A worker may be susceptible to vulnerability, but that is only significant if an employer exploits that vulnerability' (DTI 2006: 25). We argue that this is a narrow position and confines vulnerability to those already victims of abuse, rather than those exposed to unfair treatment because they are weak. Furthermore, it begs the question as to what predisposes to the risk of unfair treatment and low capacity to defend oneself. We argue that a more robust analytical approach is required to assess vulnerability. Basing this on the consideration of power relations in the workplace, lack of union representation is the first dimension of vulnerability. Second is lack of 'skill'¹ as a measure of weak labour market power associated with disposability.

¹ We use the concept of 'skill' as a descriptive labour market concept. Problems regarding its objective definition and social construction are recognised, but not debated here.

Changes to the structure of the labour market over the last 25 years suggest that vulnerable employment is increasing, with an increase in both the number and proportion of low paid, replaceable, 'lousy jobs' (Goos and Manning 2007). At the same time, the scaling back of the welfare state since 1980 has increased the costs of job loss.

A proxy for weak bargaining power, both in terms of lack of collective representation and poor labour market strength, is low pay. Thus, a strong indication of vulnerability is absence of union membership combined with low pay. If this is defined as earning below median earnings, then, according to the Labour Force Survey, around 40 per cent of the British workforce could be defined as vulnerable. This is a higher percentage than the 'one in five' who are defined as vulnerable by the TUC, which uses a narrower low-pay definition, as those in the bottom third of the hourly income distribution (TUC 2006: 7). The lower paid (earning below the median), non-unionised worker is the basis of vulnerability in the Unrepresented Worker Survey (URWS) reported here.

The URWS gathered evidence on types of employment problems experienced by low paid, non-unionised workers, how they responded to them and the outcomes to attempted resolution. The Technical Appendix (A1 and A2) discusses how low pay was calculated, the definition of non-unionism and the concept of 'problems'. Respondents had suffered from any of ten problems, including being paid unfairly, being threatened with dismissal, being bullied or subjected to undue stress or being asked to work in an unsafe environment. The overwhelming majority of the sample of 501 respondents (86 per cent) reported that they tried to do something to solve their main problem, but only 16 per cent reported a satisfactory outcome. These findings suggest to us that vulnerability is a pervasive feature of employment for lower paid, non-unionised workers, both in the types of problems and their poor rate of resolution.

Collecting representative data about low paid, unrepresented workers who had experienced problems at work presented a number of methodological challenges. These issues are investigated in more depth in the Technical Appendix A2, but key points will be summarised below.

While a face-to-face household survey would have been ideal, the method chosen within our budget constraints was a national telephone survey. Our sample was drawn from a regionally representative random sample of households. These were then screened by telephone to select a person who had been in employment in the previous three years, had experienced a problem at work, was low-paid (earning below the median) and was not a union member. The use of a fixed-line telephone survey may have introduced some sampling bias because not all households have telephones, and some households have signed up to the telephone preference service. Some of the most vulnerable workers, for example young and migrant workers in short-term accommodation, are likely to be omitted by a telephone survey. Of the 18,270 telephone contacts made, 52 per cent of households agreed to participate in the survey. However only 49 per cent of these contained workers and of these, 57 per cent of households were screened out because the respondent did not think the household contained a worker who matched the qualifying criteria for the survey (*i.e.* having had a problem at work, earned below median earnings and was not represented by a union).

The potential sample questioned at this stage was 1,971 workers. Forty nine per cent of these (966 workers) reported that they had experienced one of ten problems at work cited by the survey. While caution is needed in applying these figures to the population as a whole, they do suggest that problems at work are a relatively common experience, affecting some half of workers. Our finding is similar to that of a government commissioned survey, which found that 42 per cent of employees had experienced a problem in the previous five years (Casebourne *et al.* 2006: 98). Once we excluded workers with workplace problems who were unionised or earned above the median, the sample was again almost halved to 501 workers. These low paid, unrepresented workers who had experienced a problem in the three years preceding the survey were thus the most vulnerable of those screened. The survey fieldwork was carried out by IFF in October and November 2004.

One key challenge was the definition of a 'problem at work'. A person's perception of a problem depends on a subjective threshold of tolerance and expectations. Cognitive testing of the phrase 'problem at work' indicated that some people did not define serious workplace issues as 'problems' and only further probing revealed that these were indeed 'problems' in terms of the ten areas we considered relevant. This was because of low norms and expectations about workplace experience, and because some people were unwilling to admit to having a 'problem'. Consequently, at the screening stage, respondents were asked about whether they had experienced a 'difficulty, worry or concern' at work and were then presented with a list of ten examples, which excluded trivial issues. Since we wished to glean information on experiences that caused worry, distress or a sense of unfairness, and were serious enough to warrant strategies to try to resolve them, the problem(s) could be a critical incident or a chronic situation. Respondents were first asked about all problems they had experienced in any job in the past three years, to give an indication of a broad spectrum of difficulties. To narrow the questionnaire, they were then asked to focus upon *one job* in which they had their main problems. These were then examined in greater detail. Finally, respondents were asked to select the *main problem* they considered for remedy, and whether they sought advice and took any action to solve it.

We investigated how well our sample corresponded to the labour force as a whole, as captured by the Labour Force Survey (LFS) at the time - 2004 (details Appendix A3). Chi squared tests² were used to investigate whether there were any statistically significant differences between the characteristics of the Unrepresented Worker Survey (the URWS), the workforce as a whole and a sub-sample of the LFS who were not union members and earned less than median earnings (Table A3).

² See the Statistical Analysis Methods section in the Appendix, A4, for a fuller explanation of the statistical techniques used in the analysis.

Briefly, women were over-represented in the URWS compared with their share of the workforce as a whole, but this was similar to their over-representation in the non-unionised, low-paid section of the labour force – a finding of little surprise in view of the gender wage-gap of 17.1 per cent between full-time men and women’s hourly earnings and the 38.4 per cent gap between part-time female and full-time male hourly earnings (EOC, 2006: 20). While young workers (under 24 years) had a higher presence in the low paid, non-unionised section of the LFS than in the workforce as a whole, this over-representation was not reflected in the URWS – possibly because of under-sampling. Ethnic minority workers were more likely to appear in the URWS compared to the workforce as a whole and all low paid unrepresented workers in the LFS. URWS respondents were also more likely to work in the private sector than the LFS in general, but had a similar representation to low-paid, non-unionised workers in the LFS. There were more retail, hotel and restaurants workers in the URWS than the LFS as a whole although not low-paid non-unionised workers in the LFS, and more health and social services workers than in both the LFS and the low-paid unorganised among them. Construction workers, however, were less likely in the URWS than in either the whole or the sub-sample of the LFS. Our respondents were also more likely to work in smaller workplaces (below 25 workers), and in unskilled and semi-skilled manual and personal services occupations, to have non-standard employment contracts and to have been in their job for six months or less.

These differences may arise for one of three reasons. First, some workers with a given characteristic are more likely to experience a problem. Second, as a result of sampling error in the URWS - for example younger workers may be harder to contact by fixed telephone line. Third, because reporting a problem depends on subjective definition of a ‘problem’ and readiness to talk about it, a process which depends on norms and expectations, which may vary systematically by workers’ job, workplace and demographic characteristics.

This report summarises the key findings of the URWS. Chapter Two investigates the problems in more detail. Chapter Three looks at the advice and actions that workers took to try and deal with their problems. Chapter Four considers respondents’ attitudes and behaviour towards trade unions. Simply put, did the experience of a problem make workers more likely to want to unionise, and did

workers' previous experience and attitudes towards unions influence the way they dealt with problems? Chapter Five looks at the outcomes of attempts to resolve problems: did workers achieve satisfactory resolutions or not and what is the relationship between voice, resolution and exit? Chapter Six concludes. The nature of the URWS sample and conceptual and methodological issues are detailed in the Appendix.

In addition to exploring the nature of problems, who experiences them, how they respond and their success in resolving them, three threads run through the paper. First is an interest in how former experience of unions, if any, affects workers' response to their problems. Second, is an interest in whether the existence of institutional procedures for workplace dispute resolution and for management-worker consultation related to problems, how they were dealt with and degree of resolution. Third, is an interest in whether respondents felt that the problem that they experienced was a violation of their rights. Overall, 55 per cent of respondents felt that their rights had been breached in one or more of the problems that they had experienced, and 40 per cent of all problems were perceived as rights violations.

2. The nature of the problems

In this section, we set out in more detail the nature of the problems experienced by our respondents. One notable finding is that multiple problems are common. We then investigate the extent to which respondents felt that their main problem was a violation of their rights. Finally, we explore whether particular problems were more or less common for particular types of workers in particular types of work settings.

2.1 Analysis of all problems

The URWS first asked respondents about all problems experienced at work in the three years prior to their participation in the survey (Table 2.1).

Table 2.1: The nature of problems

	<i>All problems experienced in all jobs in past 3 years</i>		<i>All problems experienced in screened job</i>		<i>Main problem pushed hardest to solve</i>	
	<i>Number</i>	<i>Per cent</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Per cent</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Per cent</i>
1. Pay ⁽¹⁾	191	38.1	181	36.1	80	16
2. Work relations, such as stress or bullying	184	36.7	172	34.3	76	15.2
3. Workload	160	31.9	143	28.5	46	9.2
4. Job Security	152	30.3	124	24.8	32	6.4
5. Working hours	143	28.5	127	25.3	32	6.4
6. Contract or job description	133	26.5	115	22.8	24	4.8
7. Health and Safety	122	24.4	109	21.8	42	8.4
8. Opportunities	121	24.2	102	20.4	27	5.4
9. Taking time-off	120	24.0	109	21.8	30	6
10. Discrimination ⁽²⁾	89	17.8	76	15.2	19	3.8
Multiple problems acted on					7	1.4
Multiple problems which at first said did not act upon ⁽³⁾					86	17.2

Notes: Results rounded to one decimal place.

⁽¹⁾ Such as not being paid the correct amount, not being paid regularly, or not receiving pay for holidays or overtime etc

⁽²⁾ Towards yourself.

⁽³⁾ When asked about action, some people could not separate out their problems. These were called 'multiple problems'. This group comprises the 86 people who at first said they did not try to do anything about their main problem, so were not asked about it and hence detail is lost. However, they were still asked if they took *advice*. After this, it transpired that 16 of these did in fact take action, reducing the 'non-actors' from 86 to 70 (14 per cent of the sample).

It then asked respondents to focus on *one* job (the screened job) and identify the problems in that one, as well as detail the key aspects of these. It finally asked about *one* problem (the main problem) which the worker 'pushed hardest' to resolve in terms of possible advice and action taken – bearing in mind that some might have decided no to do anything. Table 2.1 summarises responses to these questions about the nature of problems and demonstrates their frequency.

Overlapping problems

Over the three years of recall of different jobs, nobody in our sample experienced only one problem. Table 2.2 illustrates overlaps. Generally, overlaps are fairly evenly spread. Between a quarter and a third of any of the ten problem groups also experienced each of the other of the ten problems. In many cases the overlap is even greater, with around half of the sample experiencing problems in workload and work relations (primarily stress and bullying, see Section 2.2); job security, work relations and pay; working hours, pay and workload; contracts and

job security; health and safety and work relations; job opportunities and job security; difficulty with taking time off, working hours and work relations; and discrimination and work relations (57 per cent overlap), job security and pay.

Table 2.2: Overlap of problems over 3 years, in rank order of problem occurrence

		Pay	Job Security	Oppor-tunities	Discrimi-nation	Time off	Working Hours	Work Load	Health & Safety	Contract	Work Relations
Pay	N=	191	71	46	44	51	71	62	49	57	58
	Row (%)	100.0	37.2	24.1	23.0	26.7	37.2	32.5	25.7	29.8	30.4
Stress	N=	58	69	47	51	55	60	73	59	58	184
	Row (%)	31.5	37.5	25.5	27.7	29.9	32.6	39.7	32.1	31.5	100.0
Work Load	N=	62	49	52	31	54	67	160	48	54	73
	Row (%)	38.8	30.6	32.5	19.4	33.8	41.9	100.0	30.0	33.8	45.6
Job security	N=	71	152	58	47	45	59	49	50	50	69
	Row (%)	46.7	100.0	38.2	30.9	29.6	38.8	32.2	32.9	32.9	45.4
Working hours	N=	71	59	42	30	59	143	67	49	60	60
	Row (%)	49.7	41.3	29.4	21.0	41.3	100.0	46.9	34.3	42.0	42.0
Contract	N=	57	64	51	35	44	60	54	42	133	58
	Row (%)	42.9	48.1	38.3	26.3	33.1	45.1	40.6	31.6	100.0	43.6
Health & Safety	N=	49	50	38	27	37	49	48	122	42	59
	Row (%)	40.2	41.0	31.1	22.1	30.3	40.2	39.3	100.0	34.4	48.4
Opportunities	N=	46	58	121	32	35	42	52	38	51	47
	Row (%)	38.0	47.9	100.0	26.4	28.9	34.7	43.0	31.4	42.1	38.8
Time off	N=	51	45	35	31	120	59	54	37	44	55
	Row (%)	42.5	37.5	29.2	25.8	100.0	49.2	45.0	30.8	36.7	45.8
Discrimi-nation	N=	44	47	32	89	31	30	31	27	35	51
	Row (%)	49.4	52.8	36.0	100.0	34.8	33.7	34.8	30.3	39.3	57.3

Note: Numbers in bold are total in that problem area.

Focusing on the *one* screened job with the main problems, two fifths of the sample had *one* problem, a fifth had two problems and fewer still had three or four problems (Table 2.3). Only 4 per cent had more than six problems.

Table 2.3: Number of problems experienced in screened job

Number of Problems in Screened Job (Total (n)=501)	% of Sample with number of problems in screened job
1 problem	42%
2 problems	21%
3 problems	13%
4 problems	9%
5 problems	8%
6 problems	3%

2.2 The nature of problems in the screened job

The URWS then went on to ask more about the nature of problems experienced in the respondent's main job. The following section summarises these results.

1. Problems with pay (36 per cent of sample).

Two areas, 'pay being less than others in your type of job', and 'pay being incorrect', stand out as the major forms of pay problems among those with a pay problem (Table 2.4).

Table 2.4: Pay problems by types

	N=	Per cent
<i>Pay being less than what others in your type of job earn</i>	75	41.4
<i>It not being clear how the amount in your pay packet had been determined</i>	37	20.4
<i>Pay being incorrect</i>	75	41.4
<i>Pay being withheld (not being paid for work done)</i>	30	16.6
<i>Not getting paid for overtime that you had done</i>	49	27.1
<i>Not getting paid for holidays</i>	33	18.2
<i>Not getting paid for sick days</i>	31	17.1
<i>Not getting paid for maternity/paternity leave</i>	3	1.7
<i>Pay being late</i>	39	21.5

Not getting paid for overtime, pay being late and being unclear about how the pay packet was determined were further important problems for 27, 21 and 20 per cent of these workers, while not getting paid holidays or sick-pay affected a further 18 and 17 per cent.

2. Problems with work relations (34 per cent of sample)

The largest category here was stress (70 per cent), followed by 'management taking advantage or bullying' (55 per cent), with a substantial group (27 per cent) also reporting bullying by other workers (Table 2.5).

Table 2.5: Work relations problems by types

	<i>N=</i>	<i>Percent</i>
<i>Stress</i>	121	70.3
<i>Management taking advantage or bullying me</i>	94	54.7
<i>Bullying by other workers</i>	47	27.3
<i>Management attitude/lack of support (unprompted)</i>	7	4.1
<i>Workload pressure/unrealistic expectation (unprompted)</i>	5	2.9
<i>Attitudes and behaviour of other staff/colleagues (unprompted)</i>	4	2.3
<i>Other</i>	5	2.9

3. Problems with workload (29 per cent of sample)

The three largest types of workload problems were 'too much work without enough time (70 per cent), 'management took advantage of willingness to work hard' (57 per cent) - which may be the same problem as that reported under work-relations as 'management taking advantage or bullying' – and 'put under pressure to perform too fast' (45 per cent) (Table 2.6).

Table 2.6: Workload problems by types

	<i>N=</i>	<i>Percent</i>
<i>You were put under pressure to perform too fast</i>	64	44.8
<i>You were given too much work without enough time</i>	100	69.9
<i>You were given tasks to do which were never agreed as part of your job</i>	49	34.3
<i>You were given tasks to do for which you hadn't been trained or did not have the necessary experience</i>	46	32.2
<i>Your pay was linked to targets and performance</i>	18	12.6
<i>Management took advantage of your willingness to work hard</i>	81	56.6
<i>There were not enough staff provided/staff shortage (unprompted)</i>	12	8.4
<i>You were expected to complete other people's work/take on other people's responsibilities (unprompted)</i>	4	2.8
<i>You were expected to work long hours (unprompted)</i>	2	1.4
<i>Other</i>	7	4.9

4. Problems with Working Hours (25 per cent of the sample)

The most frequently cited working-hours problems were unpredictable hours, working more hours than agreed and hours being inflexible, although there were a few examples of unprompted forms too (Table 2.7).

Table 2.7: Working hours problems by types

	N=	Percent
<i>More than agreed</i>	57	44.9
<i>Fewer than agreed</i>	7	5.5
<i>Unpredictable</i>	65	51.2
<i>Inflexible</i>	52	40.9
<i>No breaks (unprompted)</i>	2	1.8
<i>Un/Anti-social working hours (unprompted)</i>	3	2.4
<i>Long hours/overtime (unprompted)</i>	6	4.7
<i>Difficulties managing/completing workload in working hours (unprompted)</i>	4	3.1
<i>Increased working hours but no pay increase/pay not a reflection of hours worked (unprompted)</i>	4	3.1
<i>Working hours don't account for traveling time/distance (unprompted)</i>	3	2.4
<i>Other</i>	8	6.3

5. Job security problems (25 per cent of the sample)

It should be noted that this question was hardened following cognitive testing, to reduce a general malaise about security, so as to focus on an identifiable period of fear or worry about or in a job. For the majority of workers with an insecurity problem (59 per cent), 'a fear that you might lose your job (e.g. be made redundant)' dominated (Table 2.8).

Table 2.8: Job security problems by types

	N=	Percent
<i>A worry that you might lose your job (e.g. be made redundant)</i>	73	58.9
<i>Being threatened unfairly with dismissal</i>	36	29.0
<i>Actually being dismissed or sacked</i>	19	15.3
<i>Being forced to quit because of changes in your job description</i>	16	12.9
<i>Being forced to quit because of changes in your pay</i>	9	7.3
<i>Uncertainty or lack of working hours/issues with contract renewal/temporary or agency staff</i>	13	10.5
<i>Being forced to quit because of work colleagues/ management (unprompted)</i>	6	4.8

A second major problem, reported by almost a third within this problem area, was worry about unfair dismissal (29 per cent), while 15 per cent were actually unfairly dismissed.

6. Contract or job description problems (23 per cent of the sample)

There were four major areas of contract or job description problems (Table 2.9). The most-cited was lack of formal or written contract (44 per cent) – a high percentage, considering this is illegal after 2 months’ employment - but almost as important was being asked to do tasks which were not specified in the contract or job description (41 per cent) – a clear contribution to workplace conflict. Related difficulties, experienced by over a third, were over pay or conditions being different from those agreed in the contract and the associated problem of the job description containing things which were not mentioned at the job interview.

Table 2.9: Contract/job description-related problems by types

	<i>N=</i>	<i>Percent</i>
<i>Not being given a formal contract or written job description</i>	50	43.9
<i>Not getting a contract renewed</i>	13	11.4
<i>Being asked to undertake tasks not specified in my contract or job description</i>	47	41.2
<i>Pay or conditions not matching what was agreed (including working hours)</i>	39	34.2
<i>Things being in my contract or job description that/was not told about at the interview</i>	32	28.1
<i>Changes have been made to job description/contract (unprompted)</i>	7	6.1
<i>Disagree/unhappy with terms in contract (unprompted)</i>	5	4.4
<i>Contract or job description not clear or specific enough (unprompted)</i>	3	2.6
<i>Other</i>	3	2.6
<i>Don't know</i>	1	0.9

There thus seems a high degree of employer failure to provide a written agreement, or non-compliance with one.

7. Problems with health and safety (22 per cent of the sample)

In the area of Health and Safety, strikingly high percentages of the respondents cited all four forms of this problem (Table 2.10), around half agreeing that the working environment was unsafe or dangerous, that there was inadequate health and safety training, and that there was managerial negligence, and a further 42 per cent saying they were asked to do unsafe or dangerous tasks.

Table 2.10: Health and safety problems by types

	<i>N=</i>	<i>Percent</i>
<i>Managerial negligence</i>	53	48.6
<i>Being asked to do unsafe or dangerous jobs or tasks</i>	46	42.2
<i>The work environment in general was unsafe or dangerous</i>	59	54.1
<i>There was inadequate health and safety training</i>	55	50.5
<i>Poor/faulty/inadequate equipment provided (unprompted)</i>	9	8.3
<i>Poor/insufficient facilities (unprompted)</i>	5	4.6
<i>Working unsupervised/being left alone (unprompted)</i>	2	1.8
<i>Dealing with aggressive customers/don't feel safe (unprompted)</i>	1	.9
<i>Other</i>	3	2.8

A further 8 percent added the unprompted problems of being provided with poor, faulty or inadequate equipment. It is worth pointing out that, over three years, over 40 per cent of those with health and safety problems also had problems with pay, job security, working hours, and 48 per cent with work relations/stress.

8. Problems with taking time off (22 per cent of the sample)

Table 2.11: Time-off problems by types

	<i>N=</i>	<i>Percent</i>
<i>Holiday</i>	50	45.9
<i>Sickness</i>	48	44.0
<i>Maternity or paternity leave</i>	4	3.7
<i>Taking care of family members or relatives</i>	27	24.8
<i>Training</i>	10	9.2
<i>Medical (doctor / dentist / hospital) appointments (unprompted)</i>	6	5.5
<i>Bereavement (unprompted)</i>	3	2.8
<i>Other personal reasons (unprompted)</i>	7	6.4
<i>Other</i>	0	0.0

Taking time off was as important to the respondents as health and safety, and two issues dominated this area (Table 2.11): holidays (for 46 per cent) and sickness (for 44 per cent). A further quarter also had problems taking time off for family issues.

9. Problems with opportunities (20 per cent of the sample)

Opportunities problems, slightly less likely to be raised in the screened job than when three years were considered, were still reported by a fifth of the sample. This problem displayed the greatest concentration in *one* form: that of 'limited opportunities for job progression or promotion', reported by 84 per cent of this group (Table 2.12).

Table 2.12: Opportunities problems by types

	<i>N=</i>	<i>Percent</i>
<i>Limited opportunities for job progression or promotion</i>	86	84.3
<i>Limited opportunities for training to help me do the job better</i>	54	52.9
<i>Limited opportunities for training to help develop my career</i>	63	61.8
<i>Opportunity for progression/training only available to certain employees (unprompted)</i>	5	4.9
<i>Other</i>	6	5.9

Almost two thirds also cited limited training opportunities to help develop a career, and over half, problems with training opportunities to help do a better job.

10. Problems with discrimination (15 per cent of the sample)

Two findings stand out in this problem area: one is its generally low reportage, and second is the order of importance of types of discrimination, with age the foremost (28 per cent), followed by sex discrimination (20 per cent), disability (11 per cent), race (8 per cent) and religious discrimination (3 per cent) (Table 2.13). Thus, it seems that a perception of discrimination is low and may not be related to its legal status – at the time of research, age discrimination was not unlawful, although from October 2006 it was outlawed under the EU Framework Directive, in the Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006 - SI No 2006/1031.

Table 2.13: Discrimination problems by types

	N=	Percent
Sex	15	19.7
Race	6	7.9
Age	21	27.6
Religion	2	2.6
Sexual orientation	0	0
Disability or learning difficulty	8	10.5
Being a mother/ expectant mother (unprompted)	6	7.9
General victimisation/poor treatment for no reason (unprompted)	7	9.2
Personality (unprompted)	6	7.9
Health and illness (unprompted)	3	3.9
Temporary/part-time status (unprompted)	3	3.9
Favouritism/preferential treatment of others (unprompted)	4	5.3
Intelligence relating to ability to do the job (unprompted)	3	3.9
Type of role/position held in job (unprompted)	3	3.9
Relationship status outside workplace (unprompted)	2	2.6
Other	3	3.9

Also striking is the large number of unprompted additions, some in relatively large numbers. Thus, discrimination on grounds of being a mother, or being pregnant (both illegal under sex discrimination law, although not reported as such in this survey, indicating lack of knowledge of rights) is as high as race discrimination. Other quite frequent forms of ‘discrimination’ are more correctly defined as victimisation and include ‘general victimisations’ (9 per cent) and ‘personality’ (8 per cent).

The three most common *specific* problems as a percentage of all 501 respondents (each experienced by at least fifty respondents) were: *stress* (24 per cent of all respondents), *being given too much work without enough time* (20 per cent of respondents) and *management taking advantage and bullying me* (18.8 per cent of the sample). These details of problems indicate a working environment for between two fifths and a quarter of vulnerable non-unionised workers of work intensification and management bullying. Those suffering each specific problem as a percentage of all respondents are further summarised here.

Pay related: being paid less than others doing the same type of job (14.7 per cent of all respondents) and being paid the incorrect amount (14.7 per cent of respondents). **Work-relations related:** stress (24 per cent of respondents) and management taking advantage of, or bullying the respondent (18.8 per cent of respondents). **Workload related:** being given too much work without enough time (20 per cent of respondents), management taking advantage of willingness to work hard (16.2 per cent of respondents) and being put under pressure to perform too fast (12.8 per cent of respondents). **Working hours related:** working unpredictable hours (13 per cent of respondents), working more hours than agreed (11.4 per cent of respondents), or inflexible hours (10.4 per cent of respondents).

Job security related: worry about losing their job, (that is, being made redundant) (14.6 per cent of respondents). **Contract related:** not being given a formal contract or job description (10 per cent of respondents). **Health and Safety related:** working in a generally unsafe or dangerous environment (11.8 per cent of respondents), inadequate health and safety training (11 per cent of respondents) and managerial negligence (10.6 per cent of respondents). **Problems with taking time off:** problems related to holiday entitlements (10 per cent of respondents). **Opportunities related problems:** limited opportunities for promotion or progression (17.2 per cent of respondents), limited opportunities for training to help with career development (12.6 per cent of respondents) and limited opportunities for training related to the job (10.8 per cent of respondents).

2.3 Infringement of rights

Of further interest in terms of *perceptions* of these problems is a sense of injustice about them, an issue of relevance to ‘mobilisation theory’ (Kelly, 1998), which we take up later in considering *collective action* as a route to their resolution. Respondents were asked ‘Do you feel your problems were an infringement of your rights?’ This question was deliberately framed to probe beyond a sense or knowledge of legal rights alone, although responses will include infringement of employment law. However, it touches on *rights* in terms of fairness and legitimacy – a dimension of the Government’s employment policy, as expressed in, for example, reference to ‘fair treatment of employees’ in its White Paper ‘Fairness at Work’ (DTI, 1998: 1.9). In total, 278 people thought that one or more of their problems were an infringement of their rights (55 per cent). Forty per cent of all problems experienced by our respondents were viewed as rights infringements.

Table 2.14 below shows those people who thought their problem an infringement of their rights as a percentage of those who experienced that problem. This shows that the highest percentages *within each problem area* who regarded that problem as an infringement of their rights were among those who experienced problems with pay, work relations, health and safety and discrimination. The lowest were among those whose problems concerned job security and opportunities.

Table 2.14: Percentage in each problem area who thought that this problem infringed their rights (screened job)

<i>Problem</i>	<i>Total in problem area</i>	<i>Total who believe this problem infringement of rights</i>	<i>Per cent of those with that problem who felt it was an infringement of rights</i>
<i>Total problems</i>	1257	507	40.3
<i>Pay</i>	181	85	47.0*
<i>Work relations, such as stress or bullying</i>	172	81	47.0*
<i>Workload</i>	143	55	38.5
<i>Working hours</i>	127	60	47.2
<i>Job Security</i>	124	40	32.3*
<i>Contract or job description</i>	114	50	44.0
<i>Health and Safety</i>	109	55	50.5**
<i>Taking time-off</i>	109	45	41.3
<i>Opportunities</i>	102	25	24.5***
<i>Discrimination</i>	76	41	54.0**

Notes: results rounded to one decimal place.

* = statistically significant at the 10 per cent level

** = statistically significant at the 5 per cent level

*** = statistically significant at the 1 per cent level

2.4 Are some problems more common for particular groups of workers?

In this section, we turn attention to whether particular problems were more likely to be faced by particular types of workers in particular types of jobs or workplaces. Once again, our focus here is on the problems experienced in the respondent's main job. Table 2.15 demonstrates these results and also reports the results of chi2 tests, which investigate whether variations in the incidence of a particular type of problem are statistically significant or not (more detailed explanation of what this means can be found in A4, Technical Appendix).

Table 2.15: Incidence of all problems in one job by individual, job and workplace characteristics

Individual characteristics	<i>Pay</i>	<i>Work relations</i>	<i>Workload</i>	<i>Job security</i>	<i>Working hours</i>	<i>Contract issues</i>	<i>Health and safety</i>	<i>Opportunities</i>	<i>Taking time off</i>	<i>Discrimination</i>
All	36.1	34.3	28.5	24.8	25.4	23	21.8	20.4	21.8	15.2
Gender										
Male	40.3	33.7	26.5	31.1	23.9	24	26.5	26	20.9	15.8
Female	33.4	34.8	29.8	20.7***	27.6	22.3	18.7**	16.7**	22.3	14.8
Ethnicity										
White	35.7	34.4	28.2	25.6	24.7	23	21.7	20.1	20.4	14.7
Non-white ethnic minority	40.9	34.1	31.8	15.9	31.8	22.8	22.7	22.7	36.4**	20.5
Co-workers are predominantly white	36.8	34.6	27.4	24.9	26.3	24.4	21.9	21.1	20.8	16.1
Co-workers are predominantly from ethnic minority	43.8	31.3	37.5	25	28.1	25	28.1	21.9	18.9	18.8
Co-workers are mixed white and ethnic minority	30.3	33.3	29.3	20.2	20.2	17.2	19.2	15.2	26.3	9.1*
Age										
16 - 24	39	34.2	23.2	18.3	28.1	23.2	17.1	17.1	29.3*	18.3
25 - 34	35.6	29.7	30.7	37.6***	34.7	28.7	20.8	27.7**	27.7*	18.8
35 - 44	39.8	41.5*	26.3	22	22	25.4	28*	28**	19.5	15.2
45 - 54	38.8	36.4	34.7	26.5	21.5	19.8	18.2	16.5	15.7	14.1
55+	24.3**	28.4	27	17.6	20.3	17.6	25.7	9.46***	16.2	9.5
All under 40	35	33.9	26.9	27.3	29.3**	26.5*	20.3	24*	25.6*	18.2*
All over 40	37.6	35.4	30.7	22.8	21.3	20.8	23.6	17.3	17.3	12.6
Men under 40 years	37.4	34.9	28.9	33.7*	26.5	31.3	27.7	28.9*	20.5	19.3
Women under 40 years	35.8	36.6	23.9	25.4	31.3**	23.9	17.2	20.9	26.1*	16.4
Women over 40 years	32.5	31.8	35.1**	18.8**	18.2**	22.1	19.5	13.6**	16.2	13
Men over 40 years	39.6	37.4	23.1	26.7	25.3	17.6	27.5	23.1	16.5	11
Disability										
Disabled respondent	36.2	39.3	25	48.2***	39.3**	25	44.6***	32.1**	32.1**	25**
Respondent not disabled	35.7	33.1	29	21.8	23.6	22.7	18.9	18.9	20.5	13.4
Highest educational qualification										
None	32.9	30	31.4	30	21.4	15.7	20	15.7	17.1	8.6*
NVQ level 1 or equivalent	48.2	37	25.9	22.2	33.3	14.8	33.3	33.3*	18.5	18.5
NVQ level 2 or equivalent	35.7	36.4	26.6	23.4	23.4	24	27.3*	17.5	24.7	17.5
A level or equivalent	38.3	30.8	29.2	27.5	30	25	22.5	22.5	22.5	13.3
Degree or equivalent	37	36.1	28.7	17.6*	24.1	25.9	13.9**	24.1	20.4	17.6
Other qualifications	12.5**	50	37.5	43.8*	25	31.3	12.5	6.25	18.8	18.8
Caring responsibilities	36.4	40	28.2	22.7	38.2***	23.6	24.6	17.3	28.2*	20.9*
Job characteristics										
Occupation										

Individual characteristics	Pay	Work relations	Workload	Job security	Working hours	Contract issues	Health and safety	Opportunities	Taking time off	Discrimination
<i>Managerial and senior professional</i>	45.5	45.6	36.4	30.3	30.3	27.3	27.3	21.2	27.3	9.1
<i>Professional</i>	55*	35	20	35	35	25	5*	20	20	25
<i>Associate professional</i>	30.8	41	43.6**	25.6	20.5	28.2	25.6	18	20.5	18
<i>Administrative and clerical</i>	25.3**	41.8	36.3*	23.1	13.2***	23.1	17.6	23.4	22	17.6
<i>Skilled manual</i>	29.7	29.7	29.7	43.2***	40.5**	21.6	29.7	29.7	18.9	8.1
All	36.1	34.3	28.5	24.8	25.4	23	21.8	20.4	21.8	15.2
<i>Sales occupations</i>	39.5	38.3	30.9	13.6**	25.9	24.7	21	12.4*	21	12.4
<i>Personal and professional services occupations</i>	34.4	25	23.4	18.8	34.4	25	12.5*	15.6	32.8	15.6
<i>Semi-skilled manual occupations</i>	29.7	23.4	17	27.7	23.4	14.9	31.9*	14.9	19.2	8.5
<i>Unskilled</i>	47.6*	31.7	18.3	26.8	24.4	20.7	26.8	24.4	17.1	20.8
Pay										
<i>Pay quartile 1 (lowest paid)</i>	41.7*	36.5	22.6	31.3	32.2*	25.2	20.9	13.9**	23.5	17.4
<i>Pay quartile 2</i>	36	23.4***	27	20.7	30.6	18.9	22.5	18.9	22.5	12.6
<i>Pay quartile 3</i>	29.9	40.2	32.5	24.8	24.8	25.6	22.2	26.5	22.2	17.1
<i>Pay quartile 4 (highest paid)</i>	33.3	40.2	31.6	24.8	16.2***	21.4	23.1	24.8	17.1	13.7
Job tenure at time of problem										
<i>< 6 months</i>	44.4***	31.6	26.7	25.7	29.4	25.1	21.9	17.1	24.1	16
<i>6 months – 1 year</i>	31.5	35.2	20.4	16.7	24.1	16.7	18.5	24	33.3**	22.2
<i>1 – 2 years</i>	30.4	34.2	25.3	25.8	20.3	26.6	17.7	-	20.3	13.9
<i>2 – 5 years</i>	28*	42*	34	31	28	21	31**	29**	21	13
<i>5 – 10 years</i>	34.9	37.2	41.9**	16.3	21	14	18.6	7**	14	7
<i>> 10 years</i>	37.1	22.9	25.8	20	17.1	31.4	14.3	8.6*	8.6**	20
Gender and work										
<i>Man, colleagues mainly men</i>	37.3	34.6	22.7	31.8**	31.8**	27.3	32.7***	27.3**	22.7	11.8
<i>Man, colleagues gender mixed</i>	30.5	40.5*	27.5	19.1	20.6	21.4	22.1	14.5*	18.3	14.5
<i>Woman, colleagues mainly women</i>	36.5	32.7	34.6**	18.2**	27	22.6	17*	16.4	25.2	13.8
<i>Woman, colleagues gender mixed</i>	37.2	31.3	32.3	21.9	25	22.4	17.2*	18.9	22.5	16.2
<i>All, mainly men</i>	37.8	32.2	22.4*	33.6***	28	25.9	29.4***	28***	23.8	15.4
<i>All, mixed</i>	33.9	36.3	26.9	21.1	21.6	21.6	18.7	17	17*	15.2
<i>All, mainly women</i>	36.5	33.7	34.8**	19.9*	26	22.1	18.2	17.1	24.9	14.9
Non-permanent employment contract	35.4	19.3**	17.5	21.1	24.6	21.1	10.5**	14	12.3*	22.8*
<i>Part-time job</i>	36.5	23.4***	15***	15.9***	27.1	23.4	13.1**	8.4***	24.3	13.1
<i>Full-time job</i>	35.4	37.5***	32.3***	27.4***	24.5	14.3	24	24	20.9	15.8
Workplace characteristics										

Individual characteristics	Pay	Work relations	Workload	Job security	Working hours	Contract issues	Health and safety	Opportunities	Taking time off	Discrimination
Industry										
<i>Manufacturing</i>	28.6	34.3	27.1	25.7	27.1	14.3	28.6	25.8	22.9	10
<i>Construction</i>	31.3	37.5	12.5	62.5***	31.3	21.4	68.6	37.5	25	25
<i>Wholesale and retail</i>	38.5	22***	24.2	23.1	30.8	25	56.3	13.9**	27.5	12.1
<i>Hotels and restaurants</i>	38.2	32.4	29.4	35.3	29.4	23.1	19.8	17.7	20.6	11.8
<i>Transport and communications</i>	50	25	25	33.3	16.7	14.7	11.8	20.8	12.5	20.8
<i>Financial intermediation</i>	41.2	52.9	35.3	17.7	29.4	29.2	25	17.7	23.5	29.4
<i>Other business services</i>	40.9	40.9	27.3	29.6	27.3	23.5	11.8	25	18.2	25*
<i>Public administration</i>	31	37.9	37.9	24.1	13.8	22.7	20.5	41.4***	6.9*	20.7
<i>Education</i>	41	41	30.8	20.5	15.4	24.1	20.7	25.6	18	7.7
<i>Health and social work</i>	28.9	45.8***	37.4**	13.3***	27.2	28.2	10.3	14.5	27.7	15.7
<i>Other community services</i>	41.9	29	22.6	29	25.8	24.1	27.7	16.1	29	16.1
Sector										
<i>Public sector</i>	29.6	37.5	39.8***	17.1*	12.5***	23.9	15.9	25	10.2***	15.9
<i>Private sector</i>	39.2*	29.9***	25.2	79.2	29.9***	23.1	23.7	19	25.2***	15
<i>Private company working in the public sector</i>	35.4	46.2**	26.2	27.7	20	18.5	20	20	18.5	10.8
<i>Voluntary sector</i>	20.8	54.2**	37.5	30.3	20.8	33.3	20.8	25	25	29.2*
Workplace size										
<i>Fewer than 10 employees</i>	45.9**	32.1	24.8	30.3	22.9	23.9	19.3	12.8**	25.7	13.8
<i>10 - 24</i>	39	30.5	24.2	23.2	31.6	16.8*	19	19	21.1	13.7
<i>25 – employees 49 employees</i>	33.3	41.7	26.4	22.2	20.8	23.5	29.2	26.4	20.8	20.8*
<i>50 – 249 employees</i>	28.6**	36.1	33.8	20.3	27.8	23.3	21.8	21.8	15.8	11.3
<i>250 - 499 employees</i>	36	28	28	32	28	24	20	28	40**	12
<i>500+ employees</i>	35.3	35.3	35.3	29.4	26.5	35.3*	26.5	32.4*	20.6	20.6
Union Experience										
<i>Union member</i>	43.7	50*	43.8*	34.4	34.4	43.8***	25	31.3	15.6	34.4***
<i>Former union members</i>	27.9***	37.8	25.6	25	20.3	20.4	24.4	17.4	20.4	13.6
<i>Never union member</i>	40.4***	30.8	28.4	23.3	27.1	22.3	19.9	20.9	23.6	13.7
All	36.1	34.3	28.5	24.8	25.4	23	21.8	20.4	21.8	15.2

* statistically significant at the 10% level or better

** statistically significant at the 5% level or better

*** statistically significant at the 1% level or better. Statistical significance is based on comparison of the mean probability of experiencing a problem with a given characteristics compared to the mean for all workers with that problem

1. Problems with pay

Groups of workers more likely to experience pay problems were those working in micro-workplaces (fewer than 10 workers), professional occupations, unskilled occupations, the lowest earning quartile of our sample and those who had been in their job for less than six months when they experienced a problem. Those in medium sized workplaces (50-249 workers), administrative and clerical occupations, those over 55 years old and those with 'other' qualifications were less likely to experience pay problems. Former union members were less likely to have experienced pay problems, while those who had never been union members were more likely to have experienced them.

2. Problems with work relations

Workers more likely to experience problems with work relations included those who had been in the job between two and five years when they experienced the problem, men who worked in jobs which were done by both men and women, those in the health and social work sector, those working for private companies that operated in the public sector and workers in the voluntary sector. Work relations problems were less likely for those in the second pay quartile, workers with non-permanent contracts, part-time workers, workers in the wholesale and retail industry and private sector workers. Union members were more likely to have experienced a work relations problem.

3. Problems with workload

Groups of workers more likely to experience problems with workload included women aged 40 and over, women engaged in work done exclusively or mainly by women and generally those who worked in feminised workplaces with women, associate professional and administrative/clerical occupations. Those who had been in their job between five and ten years when they experienced the problem, those in the health and social work sector and in the public sector more generally were also more likely to have workload problems. They were less likely for part-time workers. Union members were more likely to have experienced a workload problem.

4. Problems with job security

Job security problems were more likely to be experienced by disabled workers, those with 'other' qualifications, skilled manual workers, those doing work which was exclusively or predominantly done by men, men aged under 40, disabled workers, full-time workers and those in the construction industry. Workers less likely to experience problems related to job security included women, particularly women aged 40 or over, those doing jobs predominantly done by women, those educated to degree level, those in sales occupations, part-time workers, those in the health and social work sector and the public sector.

5. Problems with working hours

Problems with working hours were more likely for workers with a disability, skilled manual workers, the lowest paid quartile of the survey, men doing work that was undertaken predominantly by men, those with caring responsibilities and workers in the private sector. Workers less likely to experience these problems included those aged 40 and over, especially women aged over 40, administrative and clerical occupations, the highest paid quartile of the survey and those in the public sector.

6. Contract issues

Contract issues were more likely to be a problem for those aged 40 and under and among union members.

7. Problems with health and safety

Workers more likely to experience health and safety related problems included those with a disability, those educated to NVQ level 2 or equivalent, semi-skilled occupations, respondents working predominantly with men and those with two to five years in the job. Women were less likely to experience health and safety problems, as were those educated to degree level, professional occupations, personal and protective services occupations, non-permanent employees, and part-timer workers.

8. Problems with opportunities

Workers more likely to experience problems with opportunities included those with a disability, workers in large workplaces (over 500 workers), those educated to NVQ level one or equivalent, those with two to five years in their job, men doing work predominantly done by men and those working in public administration. Problems with opportunities were less likely for women, especially women aged 40 and over, workers in sales occupations, the lowest paid quartile of the survey, those with five or more years in their job, men in gender mixed work, part-time workers, those in the retail and wholesale industry and workers in small workplaces that employ fewer than ten people.

9. Problems with taking time off

Workers more likely to experience problems taking time off included workers with a disability, ethnic minority respondents, those with caring responsibilities, women under 40 and all workers below 35 years old, workers who had been in their job for between 6 months and one year and private sector employees. This sort of problem was less likely for those who had been in their job for ten years or more, non-permanent employees, public sector workers and those employed in public administration and those aged 40 and over.

10. Problems with discrimination

Problems with discrimination were more likely for workers under 40 years, those with a disability, caring responsibilities, non-permanent employees, workers in small workplaces (25-49 employees), those in the other business services sector, the voluntary sector and union members. Those with no formal educational qualifications, workers aged 40 and over and workers in ethnically mixed workplaces were less likely to experience problems with discrimination.

2.5 Institutional context

The final question addressed by this section of the report is whether the way in which the workplace is managed is associated with workers' chances of experiencing different type of problems. Specifically, does working in a workplace with a formal grievance or disciplinary procedure or with mechanisms for consulting with employees on a regular basis significantly alter the chances of employees experiencing different types of problems compared to employees who work in workplaces without these practices? (Tables 2.16 and 2.17).

Table 2.16: Comparison of percentage of respondents with each problem in workplaces with and without grievance/disciplinary procedures

	<i>Workplace has Grievance/Disciplinary procedure</i>	<i>Workplace has No Grievance/Disciplinary procedure</i>
<i>Pay related problem</i>	30.7	44.6***
<i>Job security problem</i>	19.4	33.3***
<i>Opportunities problem</i>	20.7	19.6
<i>Discrimination problem</i>	13.6	17.9
<i>Problem with taking time off</i>	19.1	26.8
<i>Problem with working hours</i>	23.6	28.6
<i>Workload problems</i>	30.4	25.6
<i>Health and safety problem</i>	21.7	22.6
<i>Contract/ job description problem</i>	23.6	22
<i>Work relations problem</i>	36.6	30.4

* statistically significant at the 10% level or better

** statistically significant at the 5% level or better

*** statistically significant at the 1% level or better

Results rounded to one decimal place

According to the 2004 Workplace Employment Relations Survey, 96 per cent of employees who worked in workplaces that employ ten or more people are covered by individual grievance procedures (Kersley *et al.* 2006: 213), although such procedures might be less common in workplaces with fewer than five employees (which are not surveyed by WERS) and some of the URWS worked in these small workplaces.

By contrast, just 62 per cent of our sample reported that their workplace had such a procedure. Information here was dependent on worker respondents' knowledge or understanding of the existence of such procedures and/or mechanisms³. Although only 4.8 per cent of respondents said they did not know whether there were any set rules for how problems between employer and staff should be dealt with, it could be that those who said there were none were unaware of them because they were not publicised, and existed purely for legal compliance reasons. There are thus limitations to the reliability of our information on such procedures.

Nevertheless, our results do suggest that a significant proportion of vulnerable workers do not have access to grievance procedures, either because they do not exist at their workplace, or because their employer does not provide adequate information. Interestingly, respondents were less likely to experience problems with pay and job security if they reported working in a workplace that had a grievance or disciplinary procedure.

Sixty per cent of our sample reported working in a workplace where employees met regularly with management to discuss workplace issues. Again, it appears that most workers knew whether or not such procedures existed, since only 3.2 per cent did not know if there were regular meetings between staff or their representative to discuss workplace issues. Again, those who said there were none may have said so because nobody had brought this to their attention. It is difficult to gauge how well this figure corresponds with the Workplace

³ The questions asked were 'In the workplace where you were/are having problems, if a problem came up between you and your employer, are there set rules for how they should be dealt with? (Prompt if necessary: for example, the making of a written statement or warning, or a formal meeting), and: 'In the workplace where you had the problems, could/can staff or their representatives meet regularly with management to discuss workplace issues?'

Employment Relations Survey, because the questions are not directly comparable⁴.

Table 2.17: Comparison of percentage of respondents with each problem in workplaces with and without information and consultation procedures

	<i>Regular meetings to discuss workplace issues</i>	<i>No regular meetings to discuss workplace issues</i>
<i>Pay related problem</i>	32.8	42.5**
<i>Job security problem</i>	20.7	31.2***
<i>Opportunities problem</i>	19.4	23.1
<i>Discrimination problem</i>	11.4	19.4**
<i>Problem with taking time off</i>	17.7	27.4**
<i>Problem with working hours</i>	20.1	35***
<i>Workload problems</i>	27.4	31.2
<i>Health and safety problem</i>	19.4	26.9
<i>Contract/ job description problem</i>	20.7	26.9
<i>Work relations problem</i>	33.1	37.6

* statistically significant at the 10% level or better

** statistically significant at the 5% level or better

*** statistically significant at the 1% level or better

Results rounded to one decimal place

Workers were less likely to report problems with pay, job security, discrimination, taking time off or working hours if they reported regular meetings with management at their workplace.

⁴ However, although the questions are not the same, a composite measure for 'employee representation' suggests a similar pattern. WERS 2004 found that 40 per cent of employees in workplaces of 10-24 employees had an arrangement compared with 92 per cent of those in workplaces with above 500 workers, and 61 per cent in the private sector compared with 98 per cent in the public (Kersley *et al.* 2006: 133). In the Unrepresented Worker survey, while an average 60 per cent of all respondents had an employee representation/management consultation procedure, 73 per cent had one in workplaces of over 500 employees, but only 54 per cent of those in workplaces with below 25 workers and 67 per cent of those in the public sector compared with 56 per cent in the private sector.

2.6 Identifying a main problem ‘pushed hardest’.

Commentary so far has addressed several problems, first over three years, then in one screened job. Subsequent analysis focuses on what people did about a *main problem* they ‘pushed hardest’ to try to solve. It is worth noting, at this point, that while most pushed hardest on the problems most frequently reported, there were exceptions. Thus, the three most frequently reported problems – on pay, work relations and workload were also those selected as the main ones ‘pushed hardest’ (Table 2.1). However, Health and Safety, the seventh most frequent as one of several, came fourth in terms of a ‘main problem’. This suggests that where it arises as a problem, it might lead to stronger attempts at resolution. In fact, as analysis of actions shows, this is not the case, which suggests Health and Safety is regarded as a key problem, but ‘pushing it hardest’ as a psychological priority is not the same as action. ‘Taking time off’ also rose in frequency as a main problem compared to its general frequency.

Summary and conclusions

The most frequent *categories of problems* among vulnerable workers in the three years prior to interview were over pay (primarily pay being less than others in similar jobs or pay being incorrect), work relations (overwhelmingly stress, followed by management bullying), workload, job security (primarily a worry that they would lose their job), working hours (mainly unpredictability and working more than agreed), contract or job description (mainly lack of a written job description and being asked to do things not specified if there was one), health and safety, job opportunities, taking time off and discrimination. In most of these areas, around half felt their problem an infringement of their rights. All suffered numerous problems. When *details of problems* are examined, aspects of work intensification emerge as the main ones: stress, being given too much work without enough time and management taking advantage or bullying.

Different patterns of greater vulnerability to experience these ten problems show some variation by workplace, industry and worker characteristics. For example, unskilled workers, the lowest paid and those with only a few months service are the most likely to have pay problems. Workers with disabilities are more likely to suffer six of the ten problems. Work relations problems, such as stress and bullying, are more likely for those with two to five years' service, in health and social work, companies contracted to the public sector and in mixed-sex workplaces. Older women working in mainly female environments, workers in clerical and administrative jobs and (again) in health, social work and the wider public sector, are most vulnerable to workload problems. Insecurity and working-hours problems are especially likely for workers with disabilities, skilled manual full-time workers, those in the construction industry and workers who work in mainly male workplaces. Health and safety problems are also more likely to be experienced in male working environments and among the semi-skilled. Problems with taking time off are, not surprisingly, more likely among those with caring responsibilities, younger women as well as among ethnic minority and disabled workers, those with short tenure and private sector employees in general. Discrimination problems (the most frequent expression of which being age and sex, along with general victimisation) was more likely for those with disabilities, caring responsibilities and non-permanent employees.

Finally, we note that among institutional procedures at work, those to resolve workplace conflict have less association with reduced incidence of problems than those to regularly communicate between managers and workers or their representatives. Having a workplace disciplinary and grievance procedure reduced the likelihood of problems with pay and job security, but not other problems, whereas having regular meetings to discuss workplace issues similarly reduced the chances of problems with pay and job security, but also, discrimination, taking time off and working hours problems. However, neither formal process had relationship with a reduction in the second or third most important problems – work relations and workload.

3. What do unrepresented workers do about problems at work?

What do vulnerable workers do when they experience a problem at work? The industrial relations literature has typically conceptualized workers' choices in terms of 'exit', 'voice' or 'loyalty' (Hirschman 1970; Freeman and Medoff 1984). The aim of this chapter is to take a more nuanced look at the way in which workers who lack a formal collective voice at work respond to problems. Do they simply 'suffer in silence' (Boroff and Lewin 1997: 60), do they seek to do something about their problems, or do they leave? Overall, 86 per cent of our respondents tried to do something about their problems (exercised informal or individual voice), but a large number of them also left the job in which they experienced the problems – 42 per cent of respondents were no longer in the same job.

At this stage we focus on the actions workers take: the form of voice that they exercise. We will consider the relationship between voice, exit and outcomes later. We start by investigating sources of advice on the problems that workers faced and then consider who took action (exercised voice) and the form of actions that they took. In particular, we focus on workers who took informal collective action with co-workers. We feel this form of action is particularly interesting because of what it tells us about collective activity among workers whose employment relationship with their employer is typically managed in an individualistic way.

3.1 Seeking advice

Who Took Advice?

Sixty one per cent of our sample sought advice about the problem that they pushed hardest to do something about. A series of regression analyses were used to investigate whether there was any relationship between types of problems, personal, job and workplace characteristics⁵ and a propensity to seek advice.

Looking first at the relationship between problems and seeking advice, respondents who had pushed hardest to solve multiple questions were the omitted reference category for regression analysis. Compared to this group, respondents whose main problem related to pay, opportunities, discrimination, workload, health and safety, contract issues and work relations were more likely to seek advice, while those whose problems concerned job security, taking time off or working hours were no more or less likely to seek advice.

In simple models, without further controls, the lowest paid, semi-skilled and unskilled manual occupations, part-time workers and those in small workplaces were less likely to seek advice. However, once controls were added, these results were no longer statistically significant. In the models with controls, women and disabled workers were more likely to seek advice. Those who perceived their rights to have been violated were also significantly more likely to have sought advice. Union experience had no influence on propensity to seek advice.

From whom did they take advice?

From whom did *respondents* seek advice? Table 3.1 summarises the main sources of advice and which source of advice respondents thought to be the most influential.

Table 3.1: Sources of advice, percentage of sample

	<i>Source of advice</i>	<i>Most influential advice</i>
<i>Senior manager</i>	34.3	11.7

⁵ The variables included gender, disability, whether respondent was over 40, disability, highest educational qualification, whether respondent had caring responsibilities, occupational group, pay quartile, job tenure at the time of the problem, gender and racial composition of the workplace, part-time status, non-permanent employment contract, industry, public and voluntary sectors, industry and workplace size.

<i>Friends and colleagues at work</i>	33.0	19.5
<i>Line manager</i>	31.0	10.2
<i>Family or friends outside of work</i>	22.2	16.4
<i>Citizens Advice Bureau</i>	12.8	4.7
<i>Trade union</i>	5.2	3.1
<i>Others in a similar situation</i>	4.6	-
<i>Personnel/ HR department</i>	3.9	-
<i>Professional body</i>	2.9	-
ACAS	2.9	5.5
<i>Base observations</i>	306	128

Note – column totals do not sum to 100 per cent because respondents could select multiple sources of advice and the table does not include sources of advice which less than two per cent of respondents used/ found influential.

Table 3.1 shows that senior managers were the most common source of advice, closely followed by friends and colleagues at work and their line managers. Interestingly, however, advice provided by friends and colleagues at work, rather than by managers, was considered the most influential by our respondents. Overall, about one in five of those who sought advice (*i.e.* 12 per cent of all vulnerable workers with problems) went to an independent, external source of advice, such as a trade union, ACAS, a Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB), solicitor or Law Centre, professional body, but the single most important external recourse was the CAB (12.8 per cent of those who sought advice went to a CAB, and 4.7 per cent rated this as the most influential advice they received).

Ease of obtaining advice

A little over half of respondent found it easy or very easy to obtain advice. Regression analysis revealed that respondents were more likely to have found it easy to obtain advice if their problem concerned pay, taking time off, working hours or work relations. Respondents who worked mainly with men were also more likely to have found it easy to get advice. Conversely, respondents displaying characteristics that are particularly likely to be associated with vulnerability – carers, the disabled, ethnic minorities and those who felt that their problem represented a violation of their rights – were less likely to have found it easy to get advice.

What advice was given?

The majority were advised to approach their line managers and senior managers. Table 3.2 summarises the advice that respondents were given.

Table 3.2: Advice was given, percentage of those who sought advice

<i>What advice was given?</i>	<i>% of those who sought advice</i>
<i>Approach line manager informally</i>	57.2
<i>Approach senior manager informally</i>	45.1
<i>Approach co-workers responsible for the problem</i>	26.4
<i>Use a formal grievance procedure</i>	22.9
<i>Seek further advice from a CABx</i>	11.4
<i>Begin employment tribunal/legal proceedings</i>	8.9
<i>Approach a trade union for help</i>	13.7
<i>Get a friend or family member to sort it out</i>	6.2
<i>Join with others in the workplace who share the respondents concern or problem</i>	26.1
<i>Do nothing/put up and shut up/wait and see</i>	44.2
<i>Resign</i>	6.2
<i>Document the problem</i>	1
<i>Seek further advice from an official body or other organisation</i>	1.6

N = 306, results rounded to one decimal place.

A notable finding is the relatively low proportion of respondents who were advised to make use of grievance procedures, which suggests lack of knowledge or views that they are ineffective. Further analysis also revealed that managers, especially line managers, were less likely than average to recommend using grievance procedures. While 22.9 per cent of respondents received the advice to use a grievance procedure, just 13.7 per cent of those who approached a line manager received that advice. This difference is statistically significant at the one per cent level.

Are particular sources of advice associated with particular characteristics or problems?

To investigate whether seeking advice from particular sources was associated with specific problems or personal, job or workplace characteristics, union background and perceptions of rights violation, a series of regression models were estimated. The key results follow:

Friends and Family

Women were less likely to seek advice from this source. Respondents in small workplaces were more likely to seek advice from friends and family, as were those who felt that their rights had been violated.

Line managers

Respondents whose problem concerned workload, health and safety and contract or job description issues were more likely to seek advice from their line manager, as were older workers and the disabled. The lowest paid quartile of respondents; those employed in workplaces with fewer than 25 and also in workplaces with more than 250 employees were all less likely to seek advice from their line manager.

Senior managers

Respondents were more likely to seek advice from a senior manager if their problem concerned pay and if they worked in the production sector or community services. Respondents from workplaces staffed mainly by men or ethnic minority workers were less likely to approach senior managers for advice.

Friends and colleagues

Respondents who felt that their problem had breached their rights were more likely to seek advice from friends and colleagues.

Citizens' Advice Bureaux

Those most likely to seek advice from CABx include those who felt that their rights were violated, and those whose problems concerned discrimination, pay, job security, taking time off and working hours. Clerical and unskilled occupations and public sector workers were less likely to approach a CABx.

Trade unions

Because of the relatively small number of respondents who sought advice from trade unions, it is difficult to fit regression models that generate statistically meaningful results when the full set of control variables are included in the analysis. Results from simple models (without a full set of control variables) suggest that union members and those with job security related problems were

more likely to approach unions, while those in small workplaces were less likely to approach unions.

Reasons for not seeking advice

While the majority of workers sought advice, 39 per cent did not. Reasons for not doing so were fairly evenly divided. The largest group (14 per cent) said they 'did not know who to seek advice from', followed by, 'I knew what I wanted without advice (12 per cent), 'my problem wasn't important enough' (11 per cent) and 'it never occurred to me' (11 per cent). Of those who sought advice, a majority (53 per cent) found it easy or very easy to access advice, with 25 per cent finding it difficult and 14 per cent finding it very difficult to access advice. The remainder of respondents didn't know whether it had been easy or difficult to get advice.

3.2 Who takes action?

Overall, 85.6 per cent of our sample reported taking some sort of action about their main problem. Only 14 per cent said they did nothing. There was little statistically significant variation in the characteristics of workers who did not take action, although respondents who had been in their job for less than a year when they experienced their problem, and semi-skilled manual occupations were less likely to take action than those who had longer job tenures. Respondents without formal educational qualifications were slightly more likely to take action.

The main reasons for not doing anything were, 'I did not think I would be successful' (12 per cent), 'others at work had the same problem, and that made me put up with it' (12 per cent), 'I was worried I might lose my job' (11 per cent).

Certain 'main' problems were associated with greater propensity to take action, as Table 3.3 shows.

Table 3.3: Did the respondent take action on their main problem?

<i>Main problem</i>	<i>Percentage taking action</i>
<i>Pay</i>	91.3*
<i>Job security</i>	84.4
<i>Opportunities</i>	88.9
<i>Discrimination</i>	94.7*
<i>Taking time off</i>	83.3
<i>Working hours</i>	87.5
<i>Workload</i>	89.1
<i>Health and safety</i>	83.3
<i>Contract/job description</i>	100
<i>Work relations</i>	84.2
<i>Multiple problems</i>	75.3**
<i>All</i>	85.6

Results rounded to one decimal place. * = statistically significant at the 10 per cent level, ** = statistically significant at the 5 per cent level.

This shows that problems with pay and discrimination were most likely to lead to action, while those with so-called ‘multiple problems’ (those who initially said they did not act) the least (see note 3, Table 2.1). Sense of infringement of rights did not make action more or less likely.

While we found that two fifths of the sample had one problem in the screened job, we also found a general pattern (with some exceptions) that, the more problems the worker experienced, the greater the likelihood to take action (Table 3.4).

Table 3.4: Respondents, number of problems in screened job, and percentage who acted

<i>Number of Problems</i>	<i>Sample Number</i>	<i>Number who acted</i>	<i>Per cent who acted</i>
1	208	166	79.8
2	105	91	86.6
3	66	64	96.9
4	45	38	84.4
5	38	35	92.1
6	17	14	82.3
7	11	11	100.0
8	6	5	83.3

Regression analysis confirmed that workers with more problems were significantly more likely to take action than workers who had just one problem.

3.3 What actions are taken?

Respondents were first asked what actions they took to resolve their main problem. Of those who took action, 33.3 per cent took one action, 28.2 per cent took two, 19.6per cent took three and 13.3 per cent took four or more. The mean number of actions taken by those who took any action was 2.2. Table 3.5 summarises all actions taken. It also shows the most important action taken, based on the question, ‘Which has been the most important thing you ended up doing (or have done) to try to resolve the issue’?

Table 3.5: What actions did respondents take?

<i>Type of Action</i>	<i>All actions</i>		<i>Most important action</i>		
	<i>% of respondents (base: whole sample)</i>	<i>% of those who took type of action (base: all respondents who took any action)</i>	<i>% of all respondents (base: whole sample)</i>	<i>% of those who took action (base: respondents who took action)</i>	<i>% of respondents who took an action who regarded it as their most important action</i>
<i>Informal approach to line manager</i>	69.3	80.8	37.7	44.1	54.4
<i>Informal approach to senior manager</i>	42.7	49.9	21.8	25.4	51.1
<i>Joined together with other workers</i>	24.2	28.2	6.8	7.9	28.1
<i>Used formal complaints procedure</i>	11.6	13.5	2.4	2.8	20.7
<i>Went to Citizen's Advice Bureau</i>	9.2	10.7	3	3.5	32.6
<i>Sought help from friends or family</i>	8	9.3	2.6	3	32.5
<i>Sought help from a trade union</i>	6	7	2.4	2.8	40.0
<i>Approach to co-workers responsible for the problem</i>	5.2	6.1	3	3.5	57.7
<i>Began Employment Tribunal Proceedings</i>	2.4	2.8	1.6	1.9	66.7

Results rounded to one decimal place.

Table 3.5 shows five measures. First, the type of action as a percentage of the whole sample, second type of action as a percentage of those who acted, third, the type of action considered the most important as a percentage of the whole sample and fourth the most important action as a percentage of those who took any action. Finally, it shows the proportion of respondents who took a particular action who regarded it as their most important action.

For example almost 81 per cent of respondents who took any action did so by informally approaching a line manager. Thirty eight per cent of the *whole sample* regarded an informal approach to a manager as their main (most important) action and 44 percent of *all those who took any action* regarded an informal approach to their line manager as their most important action. When we focus just on those who took the *specific type of action* of informal approach to a manager, just over 54 per cent of these (those who took action in this way) regarded it as their most important action. By contrast, just 8 per cent of the whole sample and 9.3 per cent of respondents who took action did so by seeking help from friends or family. Just 2.6 per cent of the sample and 3 per cent of those who took any action thought this was their most important action, while of those who took sought help from friends and family, only a third thought this was their most important action, and only one third of these regarded this as their most important action. Therefore, the results suggest that informal approaches to line managers were *both* the most common form of action taken, and the form of action most likely to be regarded by those who took is as their most important action. There are some actions which were rare, such as application to an Employment Tribunal and approaching co-workers, and in these cases, higher percentages of the workers who took these actions regarded them as their most important. However, these are small minorities, whereas the cases of approaches to managers show *both common action and high evaluation of its importance*.

A striking finding is that the third most popular form of action was to join with others workers to try to tackle the problem. We investigate this result in more depth below. Similar, relatively small, proportions of respondents used their workplace's formal grievance procedure (11.6 per cent), went to a CABx (9.2 percent) and sought help from friends or family (8 per cent). Just 6 per cent reported going to a trade union. Generally, in comparison with those who went to

a manager, respondents were less likely to report that these forms of action were their most important action. Once again we used regression analysis to investigate which problems, job, personal and workplace characteristics were associated to particular actions. Key results are reported below:

Informal approach to line manager

Informal approaches to line managers were more likely if the problem concerned working hours or contract/job description issues and if the respondent was female. Former union members and workers in semi-skilled manual occupations were less likely to approach their line managers.

Informal approach to senior manager

Approaches to a senior manager were more likely if the problem concerned job security, workload and work relations, and was also more common among union members and respondents who felt that their rights had been violated.

Formal complaints procedure

Use of the workplace's formal complaints procedure was more likely for disabled respondents, ethnic minority respondents and union members.

Citizens' Advice Bureaux

External recourse to CABx was less likely if respondents reported a formal grievance procedure at their workplace and if respondents were educated to degree level. The number of those who sought help from a CAB was too small to measure for significance on other variables. A larger sample would be needed to test for significance in the survey findings of higher proportions of those with problems with discrimination, job security, pay and working hours seeking help from a CAB, although these findings cohere with other research on the types of problems dealt with by CABx (Pollert 2007a).

Sought help from friends or family

Informal help from friends and family was more likely among workers in workplaces where the majority of workers were from an ethnic minority background.

Sought help from a trade union

Unsurprisingly, union members and those with previous experience of union membership were more likely to approach a trade union for help. Those whose problems concerned discrimination and those who worked in the retail sector, transport and communications and health, social services and education were also more likely. Clerical and administrative occupations were less likely to approach a union.

Application to an Employment Tribunal

Because of the relatively small number of respondents who applied to an Employment Tribunal, it is difficult to fit regression models that generate statistically meaningful results when the full set of control variables are included in the analysis. Results from simple models (without a full set of control variables) suggest that workers in workplaces where management held regular meetings to consult with workers were less likely to go to a tribunal, while disabled respondents were more likely to take their problem to a tribunal. Respondents with a discrimination related problem were also more likely to take this form of action.

Informal collective action: Joining with other workers

Given debates about the individualisation of employment relations (Brown *et al.* 1998; 2000) and the potential for collective action (Kelly 1998), one question of particular interest is in what conditions do non-unionised, vulnerable workers begin informal collective solutions to their problems? The questionnaire ensured that 'collective action' was not simply about talking over the problems experienced. The action examined was 'Joining with others in your workplace who share your concerns to get together as a group to pursue your claims'. Just over a quarter (28 per cent) of those who took action reported taking informal collective action to try to solve their problem by joining together with their co-workers (24 per cent of all those with problems). Twenty eight per cent of those who joined with their co-workers also thought that this was the most important action which they took.

Given the widespread decline of collective organisation among British workers over the last 30 years, we find these signs of latent collectivism particularly interesting and noteworthy. Collective action was significantly more likely among workers in the Transport, Storage and Communication industries and in Health and Social Work. The more problems a respondent had experienced, the more likely they were to have taken informal collective action.

Mobilisation theory (Kelly 1998) points to the importance of group identities and the way in which workers attribute grievances in determining whether or not they will act collectively when they experience a problem or grievance. It therefore offers us a guide to some of the factors which might predispose workers to take informal collective action. In particular mobilisation theory leads us to predict that where the organisation of work results in teamwork, workers might be more likely to take informal collective action, because the team might form the basis of a group identity. Similarly, if a respondent feels that their rights have been violated, the external attribution of the cause of their problem (their employer violating their rights) should predispose them towards collective action if they have a group identity. Our results partially confirm these hypotheses. Teamwork did predict taking informal collective action, but perceiving ones rights to have been violated did not. Lower paid respondents were more likely to take informal collective action than the highest earning quartile in our sample. Part-time workers and respondents on temporary and fixed term contracts were less likely to take informal collective action.

In his discussion of research evidence on how individuals may transpose individual grievances into collective action Kelly (1998: 27) argues that it is 'in the area of interest definition and mobilization that we are weak'. In particular, he points out that 'the absence of collective organisation in a particular workplace in and of itself tells us nothing about the degree of collective interest definition amongst the workforce' (*op. cit.*: 26). The survey addressed this issue in terms of exploring collectivity in asking about group action as a response to problems. However, it also made a second probe into the issue. It asked whether the respondent felt the individual grievance experienced was a shared problem among others.

This gives an indication of the degree of consciousness of collective dissatisfaction. From this population of 'collective identifiers', the survey entered into more depth: who among these attempted informal group action about what they did. It prompted a number of possibilities, ranging from simply discussing with others what might be done, to slightly more organized forms of action – organising a group meeting and going as a group to management.

In this second probe into collectivism, respondents were asked, 'In the workplace where you had the problems, are/were your problems experienced by other people at work?' Three quarters (375 people) of those with problems answered in the affirmative. This is a high level of collective awareness. These 'collective identifiers' were next asked where they acted together: 'You mentioned that other people at your workplace shared the concerns. Did you discuss these issues or concerns with these other people or did you do anything together to try to resolve them?' Again, 75 per cent said they did (280 people). Interestingly, this second approach to examining collectivity produces a much higher percentage of 'collective actors' than the first question on types of action: 55.8 per cent of the sample now said they took some type of collective action, compared to 24 per cent who said one of their actions was group action in the earlier question.

By far the most important action was joint discussion. However, almost a fifth went as a group to see their manager and 13 per cent arranged a group meeting to discuss what they could do (Table 3.6).

Table 3.6: What did workers do when they joined with others?

<i>Type of action</i>	<i>% of those who took collective action</i>	<i>% of all workers with problems</i>
<i>Informal discussions with other workers</i>	78.6	43.9
<i>Group meeting</i>	12.9	7.2
<i>Went as a group to managers</i>	18.9	10.6
<i>Joined a union as a group</i>	2.1	1.2
<i>Stopped work as a group</i>	0.7	0.4
<i>Wrote a letter of complaint as a group</i>	2.1	1.2
<i>Resigned or accepted redundancy as a group</i>	1.8	1

While these more organised activities are minorities, such spontaneous self-organisation is considerable, considering that these workers were not unionised. Further developments of mobilisation are beyond the experience of these workers. No work stoppages or other forms of protest were recorded. The results show that, while a surprisingly high percentage attempt group action, have collective identification of problems, and attempt collective solutions, leadership and further organisation is lacking.

It is, nevertheless, important not to underestimate these findings. Despite the individualisation of the employment relationship, employer resistance to unionisation and the 'fear factor' in the workplace, collective labour continues to foment collective identity and collective action, even if only in invisible, unheard and modest forms.

Informal collective action has the potential to be the basis of a more lasting form of worker collectivism through the development of a trade union. However, our evidence suggests that in itself, informal collective action is unlikely to be a precursor to unionisation, because workers who took informal collective action were no more or less likely to want to unionise than those who did not. Of course, this does not mean that informal collective action does not have the potential to act as a springboard for unionisation, but for this potential to be realised, further action to build support for unionisation would need to be taken.

In our judgement these results are a source of cautious optimism for the resurgence of collective responses to workplace problems. They challenge the widespread perception that workers have become individualistic and atomised, so are unable to organise or articulate collective interests. However, they also show that when workers do attempt to organise collectively to tackle problems they face, the form of collective action is usually limited, with little evidence that workers are able to move from collective articulation of interests to develop and deploy collective strategies and power to challenge management. Whether or not informal collective action results in better outcomes in terms of satisfactory resolution to problems is a question that we will investigate in the final chapter.

Conclusions

The key points to emerge from this chapter are that 60 per cent of workers with problems seek advice, the most common source of advice is management, 86 per cent take action and the most common form of this is to make an informal approach to management. Only around one in ten workers make use of their workplace's formal complaints procedure. However, it is noteworthy that a significant minority of workers with problems take informal collective actions to try to solve their problems. Recourse to external sources of advice, such as CABx, trade unions and to the Employment Tribunal system is rarer still.

4. Vulnerable workers and trade unions

Trade union membership and representation has declined markedly over the last thirty years. Today, a little over a quarter of employees are trade union members (Grainger and Crowther 2007). The decline of trade unions has important implications for worker vulnerability. Collective regulation of the employment relationship has traditionally been seen as a bulwark against employers who might be tempted to exploit the vulnerability of their employees, because unions promote an awareness of individual employment rights, while collective union organisation may endow workers with greater bargaining power. Unions will only be able to regain lost membership and extend organisation to vulnerable workers if they express support for unionisation through joining or voting for union representation – albeit under the current complex legislative arrangements (Bogg 2005). This raises the question of the attitudes of our sample of vulnerable workers towards trade unions.

The previous section investigated whether respondents approached a trade union as one action out of several possible responses to dealing with their main problem at work. The URWS asked a number of further questions about trade unions: whether respondents had been union members in the past and what their general views towards trade unions were. It also asked whether they felt that union membership would have helped with their specific problem and whether they wanted to join a union. This question was asked towards the end of the questionnaire, after respondents had been asked whether they would take the same actions again to solve their problem if they were in the same position again. Over half (56 per cent) said that they would, but 39 per cent said they would not, with a further 5 per cent not knowing. While the questionnaire could have pursued what other avenues those who said they would not do the same would have taken, in the context of an already long questionnaire, this was not feasible. Instead, the line of enquiry directed attention to views on the potential of trade unions to help resolve the problems and propensity to join a union as a result of these problems.

The aim of this section is to investigate these questions about unions in more detail. Specifically, how do former union members differ from those who have

never been members? What are the general attitudes of respondents to trade unions, what do they believe about the potential of union membership to help with their problems, what are the determinants of these attitudes and beliefs and how many of our respondents wanted to join a union? Finally how do these attitudes and beliefs relate to behaviour? Specifically, were those with pro-union attitudes more likely to approach a union to try to solve their problem?

4.1 Former union experience

Bryson and Gomez (2005) found in 2001 that 48 per cent of British workers had never been trade union members, while between 20 – 25 per cent of the workforce had previously been union members across the period 1983 – 2001. In the URWS, respondents were asked about their union background during the job where they experienced problems. ‘Never members’ comprised the majority (58 per cent) with 34 per cent having been members at some point in the past. Just 6 per cent were members at the time they had the problem, although they had no union representation at their workplace. Ethnic minority workers, workers aged below 40 years old, those employed in small workplaces and in the private sector were more likely to have never been union members.

What reasons did those respondents who had never been union members give for never having joined a union? Table 4.1 summarises their responses to this question.

Table 4.1: Reasons for never having joined a trade union

	<i>Percentage of never members</i>
<i>Never worked in a union workplace</i>	33.6
<i>Union membership might cause trouble with employer</i>	1.4
<i>Never 'felt the need'</i>	27.1
<i>'I don't know much about unions'</i>	13.7
<i>'Unions are too weak to make a difference'</i>	2.1
<i>Don't like the workplace union</i>	1.4
<i>Unions too pro-management interests</i>	0.3
<i>Unions too militant</i>	1.0

Base: 292, multiple responses were possible, column total does not sum to 100 per cent because not all respondents answered the question

Interestingly, no respondents cited 'preferring to talk to management themselves' or 'preferring to use other channels of communication' as reasons for not being union members.

A second interesting issue is why former members left union membership. Existing evidence suggests that the main reason is that they left union jobs for jobs where unions were not recognized (Charlwood, 2005). The URWS offers a broader choice of reasons for leaving membership. Table 4.2 summarises the responses.

Table 4.2: Reasons for having left union membership

<i>Reasons.</i>	<i>Percentage of former members.</i>
<i>Present employer does not recognize unions</i>	24.2
<i>Joining a union may cause trouble with employer</i>	3.4
<i>Trade unions are too weak</i>	0.7
<i>The union I was a member of did little or nothing to help me</i>	4.7
<i>I don't need a union in my present job</i>	10.7
<i>Not currently employed</i>	5.4
<i>Too expensive/ poor value</i>	3.4
<i>No one has encouraged me to join</i>	2.7

Base: 149, multiple responses were possible, column total does not sum to 100 percent because not all respondents answered the question

Lack of union presence/recognition in the workplace or leaving employment were the major reasons for leaving union membership, corroborating the findings of Charlwood (2005), although a significant proportion of respondents felt that they did not need a union in the job they had at the time they experienced a problem, or felt that there was no point in union membership because unions had done

little to help them in the past or that union membership was too expensive or poor value for money.

4.2 Attitudes towards unions

Attitudes towards unions are important to the extent to which they predict behaviour. Existing research (e.g. Charlwood 2002; Kochan 1979) found that general attitudes towards unions and specific beliefs about union efficacy are both predictors of willingness to join a union. The URWS asked a number of questions about general attitudes towards unions. Responses to these questions are reported in Table 4.3

Table 4.3: General attitudes towards trade unions, percent

	<i>Disagree strongly</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neither</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Agree strongly</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>n</i>
<i>1. Unions make a real difference to workers</i>	4	13.7	9.2	51.4	21.8	3.73	469
<i>2. Unions are too weak to make a difference to workers at work</i>	18.4	42.8	10.7	18.2	9.9	2.58	467
<i>3. If I have problem at work, I prefer dealing with management myself than have a union represent me</i>	6.8	16.6	8.1	43.9	24.5	3.63	469
<i>4. I don't like unions in general</i>	23.6	51.6	9.53	10.5	4.7	2.21	465
<i>5. Unions are concerned with employers interests rather than workers</i>	22.3	49.4	8.9	14.3	5.2	2.31	462
<i>6. Unions tend to be militant</i>	12.6	47.4	8.9	14.3	5.2	2.31	562
<i>7. I don't like the existing union(s) at my workplaces</i>	12.8	39.7	25	13.7	8.8	2.66	204

Factor analysis reveals that respondents are narrowly pro-union. (This is based on the finding that the first six statements are correlated with an underlying union attitudes latent variable (with an eigenvalue of 1.247), so can be combined into a single scale (with a scale reliability coefficient of 0.63). The mean of this scale is 2.57, indicating that, on average respondents are narrowly pro-union in their general attitudes).

Looking at the responses to individual items of the scale, respondents generally agree that unions make a difference to workers, do not agree that unions are too weak or that unions are too concerned with employers' interests or that unions tend to be militant. Less encouraging for unions will be the finding that respondents would generally prefer to deal with management themselves if they have a problem at work. In other words, while being generally well disposed towards unions, a significant proportion of respondents did not see them as being particularly relevant to the employment circumstances in which they experienced a problem.

4.3 Specific beliefs about union efficacy

The URWS asked respondents if they thought that a union would have helped them with their specific problem. Over half (52.5 per cent) of respondents thought that a union could have helped, 37.2 percent thought it would not, with 10.3 per cent being undecided. Forty percent felt that their experience of problems at work made them want to become a member of a trade union.

A series of regression analyses were used to investigate the relationship between beliefs about union efficacy and the nature of the problem, individual, job and workplace characteristics. Respondents were more likely to think a union could have helped solve their problem if they had generally positive attitudes towards unions, and if they felt that the problem was a violation of their rights. However, it is not possible to identify whether this is because experiencing a rights violation makes people more likely to think that a union could help with their problem, or that those who are more likely to perceive union efficacy are also more likely to perceive that their rights have been violated. Respondents were less likely to perceive union efficacy if their problem related to workload, if they were aged over 40 and if they worked in Public Administration. In terms of age, an important finding is that *younger workers – noted for their higher level of never-membership*, were more likely than older ones to believe being a union member would have helped them.

This finding is in line with the work of Gomez, Gunderson and Meltz (2001) and Charlwood (2002), who found that younger workers in Canada and Britain respectively were more likely to desire unionisation despite lower levels of union membership.

4.4 Desire for unionisation

There have been several studies of desire for unionisation among non-union workers in Britain. Charlwood (2002; 2003) found that between 40 and 50 per cent of non-union workers would join a union if one were available to them. The URWS also examined desire for unionisation in the context of experiencing problems. Specifically, it asked if the respondents' experience of a problem made them want to join a union. Forty percent of respondents said that they would like to join a union, a figure in line with the results reported by Charlwood (2002; 2003) for the workforce as a whole. The literature on desire for unionisation among unorganised workers highlights the difference between *general* or *abstract* positive views, from a concrete decision to join a union (Bryson 2003: 5). It suggests the concept of 'frustrated demand', where the costs of joining outweigh the benefits. The URWS confirms that fewer workers actually said that they wanted to join than stated that a union would have helped. There is, nevertheless, a large overlap: 52 per cent of respondents felt a union would have helped resolve their problem and 40 per cent answered that they wanted to join a union as a result of their experience of problems, so there is a 'loss' of 12 per cent. Six per cent were unsure.

Again, a series of regression analyses were used to investigate the relationship between willingness to unionise and the nature of the problem, individual, job and workplace characteristics. Respondents were more likely to want to unionise if they had formerly been a union member, believed that a union would have helped them to deal with their problem and had generally positive attitudes towards unions.

Interestingly, those who felt that their problem represented a breach of their rights were also more likely to be willing to unionise: 48 per cent of those who thought so would join a union compared with 30 per cent of those who did not. Once again, we are not able to identify the direction of causality between these two variables. Respondents were less likely to want to unionise if their problem related to pay or if they worked in a predominantly female workplace.

4.5 Why do workers not want to unionise?

A second key question is why 60 per cent of workers did not want to unionise? Table 4.4 summarises responses to this question.

Table 4.4: Reasons for not wanting to join a union

	<i>Percentage</i>
<i>Not the sort of problems a union could help with</i>	14.7
<i>No union available in my line of work</i>	3.2
<i>Too old/ too close to retirement</i>	1.6
<i>Never thought about it</i>	3.6
<i>Don't understand/know anything/a lot about unions</i>	3.0
<i>Only work part-time/in a temporary job</i>	3.6
<i>Because I work in a close/fair/caring environment</i>	4.8
<i>Work in a small company</i>	3.6
<i>Don't know how to join don't know which union to join</i>	3.2
<i>Worried about employer response</i>	3.6
<i>Unions would make things worse create tension</i>	4.0
<i>Don't want to be represented by a union</i>	7.2
<i>Unions are against my politics/I don't believe in them</i>	8.8
<i>Unions don't/can't do much/ are out of date/don't see the point</i>	10.0
<i>Negative previous experience of unions</i>	2.8
<i>Cost/waste of money</i>	2.8
<i>No need/not applicable</i>	7.0
<i>Other/Don't know</i>	12.0

Base: 251

Broadly, just under a fifth gave no reason, one fifth cited a pragmatic reason linked to a lack of belief in union efficacy – not the sort of problem a union could help with, they felt they were too old, or no union was available. Just under one sixth provided a justification which suggested outright hostility to trade unions with the remainder of respondents citing a variety of different reasons.

The key point here is that less than one sixth of those who did not want to join gave an answer which suggests outright hostility to unions.

4.6 Beliefs about unions and union involvement as an action

To reprise a key result from the previous section, just under 6 per cent of respondents reported that they had sought help from a union to try to solve their problem. Of these, only 40 per cent reported that this was their most important action. In the preceding section, it was established that union members and those with previous experience of union membership were more likely to approach a trade union for help, as were those whose problems concerned discrimination and those who worked in the retail sector, transport and communications and health, social services and education. Clerical and administrative occupations were less likely to approach a union.

It might be expected that general attitudes towards unions, and beliefs about union efficacy might be related to the decision to involve unions. In fact, there was virtually no relationship between either general attitudes towards unions or a belief that union membership would have helped with the problem and taking action by involving a union.

This finding should be related to the nature of this questionnaire, which placed attitudinal questions on unions after probes on actual experience and action. It is probable that most respondents lacked knowledge about unions at the time they experienced the problem, while the questions about unions in the URWS made them think about unions as a potential solution to their problems. Indeed, the union-related questions could be defined as 'consciousness-raising', since they were presented after respondents were asked whether they would take the same steps again regarding their problem if they were in the same position again. From this perspective, the lack of correspondence between actual action – turning towards a union for help – and attitudes towards unions among the non-unionised (particularly considering the high percentage who had never been members), is not surprising.

Conclusions

The existing literature has established a link between attitudes towards unions and willingness to unionise (Charlwood 2002; Kochan 1979) and there is also some evidence that attitudes towards unions influence actual behaviour in the context of union recognition elections (Premack and Hunter 1988). The evidence of the URWS concerns actions in response to problems at work, which appear to contradict the attitudinal surveys which find that attitudes towards unions predict actual behaviour. Neither general attitudes towards unions nor specific beliefs about the efficacy of unions in helping with problems among the vulnerable non-unionised workers in our study predicted actually seeking to involve unions in solving a problem. The implication of this result is that attitudinal variables might be less important in predicting actual behaviour than was previously thought. It may also be the case that our questions acted as a stimulus to respondents, to get them thinking about unions, while they had not actually been thinking about unions while they were experiencing their problems. Therefore, contextual variables: the specific nature of the problem and the workers' work, family and social situation, which might facilitate access to unions, may be more important.

These findings have important implications for unions, and those who think that unions might be part of the solution to dealing with the problems of vulnerable workers. We found little evidence of hostility towards unions among our respondents. A majority of low paid, unrepresented workers who experienced problems at work believed that a union could have helped with their problem. However, only 6 per cent actually approached a union for help. Therefore, if unions are to be able to help this type of worker, they have much to do in terms of raising awareness so that more workers approach them for help. At the same time, if more workers were to approach unions, it is not at all clear that unions would have the resources to provide help (Bryson and Willman 2006).

5. Voice, resolution and exit: what happened to workers with problems?

5.1 Outcomes to action

Did the workers who participated in our survey manage to bring the problem that they pushed hardest to solve to a conclusion? Of those who achieved a conclusion, how many thought that this represented a satisfactory resolution? The 2002 Employment Act, which introduced the Statutory Dismissal and Disciplinary and Statutory Grievance Procedures in October 2004, was designed to spur employees and employers to exhaust internal workplace resolution to disputes before a dismissal or resort to an Employment Tribunal were permissible (DTI 2001: 21; Pollert 2005; 2007b). Although the Employment Bill 2007 (House of Lords 2007) will repeal the statutory procedures in 2009, following Gibbon's critical review of their effectiveness (DTI 2007a), the government retains its commitment to 'seeking to resolve more disputes in the workplace' (DTI 2006: 39). This priority, as well as debate regarding what might replace the statutory procedures, requires research evidence on workplace dispute resolution.

How do non-unionised employees fare in attempting to resolve their problems within the workplace? Our evidence on the outcomes provides some evidence. If conclusions and/or satisfactory resolutions were achieved, were there particular types of problem which were more soluble than others? Were particular types of action more likely to bring about a conclusion or satisfactory resolution? In the absence of satisfactory resolution, what did workers do? Did they just put up with the problem and remain with their employer, or did they, in the absence of effective voice at work, quit?

It will be recalled that the majority of respondents tried to resolve their problems within the workplace, primarily with their managers, with only 3 per cent starting Employment Tribunal proceedings. They were asked about the results: 'Did this action lead to any conclusion with your employer?'

This question was framed so as to identify any conclusion at all, rather than a resolution to the problem. Of the 429 respondents who took action about their problem, 47 per cent had no outcome at all (48 per cent of women, 46 per cent of men). This underlines the fact that, despite the vast majority of those with problems making several attempts to resolve them, almost half had no result at all. Just 38 per cent (162 people) reported that their problem was brought to a conclusion. Fifty two people (12 per cent of those who took action) reported that negotiations were on-going at the time of the interview. Respondents who reported a resolution were then asked if this resolution was satisfactory. Eighty people reported that their problem was resolved satisfactorily – 49 per cent of those with an outcome. However, this meant that only 16 per cent of workers who experienced problems and 18.6 per cent of workers who took some action reached a satisfactory resolution. These low levels of satisfactory resolution confirm other research findings. Genn (1999: 157) found that 52 per cent of those who took action on an employment problem reached no agreement and no resolution. Similarly, just under half of respondents to a survey of users of a West Midlands employment advice line resolved their problem (Russell and Evers 2002: 2)

5.2 Effective voice or exit?

In the study of responses to grievances or dissatisfaction at work, Hirschman's (1970) distinction between voice, exit and loyalty has become an influential theoretical framework. Hirschman argued that agents who have effective voice are more likely to stay loyal to the organisation than those who do not have a voice, so the voiceless are more likely to exit. Freeman and Medoff (1984) applied this idea to industrial relations, hypothesizing that workers who enjoyed voice mechanisms (like trade unions) would be less likely to quit than those who lacked collective voice. Evidence has tended to bear this prediction out.

Our sample of low paid, unrepresented workers lack collective voice through a trade union. However, those who took action to try to solve their problems exercised individual voice, and those who took informal collective action attempted to exercise collective voice on an ad-hoc basis. Therefore, theory suggests that effective voice (i.e. where problems have been satisfactorily resolved after workers complained) will result in lower levels of exit than ineffective voice (where workers were unable to satisfactorily resolve their problems). Is this prediction borne out by these data?

Respondents were asked if they were currently in the same job in which they had experienced the problem (the problem could have occurred at any point in the previous three years). Overall, 58 per cent were in the same job, 16 per cent had experienced the problem in their most recent job (and left it) and 26 per cent had the problem in a job prior to this. This gives us a measure of exit. Note that it is not a perfect measure for our purposes, because it cannot tell us if the respondent left voluntarily or was dismissed or made redundant. Nevertheless, it is likely to be indicative of voluntary quits.

The first finding from this survey regarding ‘exit’ is that it should not be posed as *an alternative* to ‘voice’ at the individual level. Those who had left their jobs were no less likely to have tried to resolve their problems through some kind of action than those who were still in the job with the problems at the time of interview (Table 5.1)

Table 5.1: Were respondents who left the screened job less likely to take action?

	<i>% who took action</i>
<i>Respondents still in screened job</i>	86
<i>Respondents who have left screened job</i>	85
<i>All</i>	86

However, the probability of achieving a satisfactory resolution for respondents who had not quit was double that of respondents who quit. Twenty four per cent of respondents who were in the same job achieved a satisfactory resolution compared to just 12 per cent of those who had quit their ‘problem job’. This difference was statistically significant at the one per cent level.

Put another way, 29 per cent of those who had achieved a satisfactory resolution had quit, compared to 44 per cent of those who had not reached a satisfactory resolution. This means that quit rates were 65 per cent higher for workers who failed to achieve a satisfactory resolution. This result was robust to the addition of controls for individual, job and workplace characteristics, as well as variables for the type of problem and the type of action taken. Therefore we can say with a degree of confidence that effective voice that results in workers resolving problems to their own satisfaction results in lower quit rates. It is noticeable that the majority of our respondents seem to lack such effective voice.

It therefore seems likely that there are considerable costs involved in failing to satisfactorily resolve problems at work. Employees may face financial, health and psychological costs when leaving their job. In our sample, 15 per cent were unemployed at the time of interview. And there is the cost to the employer. According to government estimates, the average cost of hiring a worker is £4,200 (DTI 2007b: 97). It is likely that lower paid employees will cost less to hire, but the costs to employers of this labour turnover, and the effect on profit margins may be substantial.

5.3 Factors associated with resolution of the problem

A series of regression analyses were used to investigate first, the relationship between *any conclusion* and type of problem, type of action and individual, job and workplace characteristics and second, between *satisfactory resolution* and type of problem, type of action and individual, job and workplace characteristics. Pay problems and problems concerning work relations were more likely to reach a conclusion than other problems. These problems were also more likely to result in satisfactory resolutions. Taking informal collective action was more likely than other actions to result in a conclusion to the problem, but it was not more likely to result in a satisfactory resolution.

There were no types of actions which appear more likely to bring about satisfactory resolutions to problems. However, when respondents took action by going to a CAB or trade union, they were less likely to get a successful resolution. This may be because workers only went outside the workplace if their problem was serious or difficult to resolve. And it may be that external remedy to such difficulties, without collective representation to back it, is inadequate.

Problems that respondents perceived to be violations of their employment rights were also less likely to be satisfactorily resolved. Interestingly, when workplaces had mechanisms for regular consultation and communication between employees and management, problems were more likely to reach a conclusion, and to be resolved satisfactorily. However, respondents who had a formal grievance procedure were not significantly more likely to get a conclusion or a satisfactory resolution than those who worked in a workplace without such a procedure (Table 5.2)

Table 5.2: Outcomes by the presence of workplace grievance procedures and consultation

	<i>Consultation Procedure</i>		<i>Grievance Procedure</i>	
	<i>% Yes</i>	<i>% No</i>	<i>% Yes</i>	<i>% No</i>
<i>Respondents who took action (base 429)</i>				
<i>No outcome</i>	59	67.3*	63.2	60.6
<i>Any outcome</i>	41	32.7*	36.8	39.4
<i>Respondents who took action (base 429)</i>				
<i>No outcome/unsatisfactory outcome</i>	77.3	88***	80.7	82.5
<i>Satisfactory outcome</i>	22.7	12***	19.3	17.5
<i>Respondents with an outcome (base 162)</i>				
<i>Unsatisfactory outcome</i>	43.1	62.8**	46.4	54.1
<i>Satisfactory outcome</i>	56.9	37.3**	53.6	45.9

* =statistically significant at the 10 per cent level

** = statistically significant at the 5 per cent level

*** = statistically significant at the 1 per cent level

Clerical and administrative occupations were less likely to get satisfactory resolutions. Union status and former union experience had no impact on a respondent's probability of getting a satisfactory resolution, although former union members were more likely to report a conclusion. Finally, respondents who had favourable general attitudes towards unions were more likely to achieve a satisfactory resolution, although why this should be so is an open question.

5.4 Factors associated with exit

Given the clear relationship between failing to get a satisfactory resolution and exit, and the costs for both employers and employees in exit, it is interesting to investigate the relationships between exit and problems, actions and personal, job and workplace characteristics. Once again, we use a series of regression analyses to investigate these relationships. Respondents were less likely to quit if their problem concerned pay, taking time off, workload, health and safety and work relations. Interestingly, those workers who took informal collective action were less likely to quit. This suggests that allowing or encouraging collectivity in the workplace is likely to improve employment stability. However, respondents who took their problem to a senior manager, and respondents who took a case to an Employment Tribunal were more likely to have quit, possibly because these actions suggest heightened confrontation. Workers were also more likely to have quit if they experienced the problem within the first six months of employment. Ethnic minority respondents were also more likely to have quit. There was no relationship between previous union experience and quitting. We have already established that there was no relationship between the presence of grievance procedures and resolution of problems, but workers were less likely to have quit if they reported that their workplace had a grievance procedure. This suggests that while grievance procedures do not do much for workers in terms of bringing about satisfactory resolutions to problems, they do serve management by reducing labour turnover with its associated costs.

Conclusion

This Chapter has demonstrated that only a small minority of workers who experience problems at work achieve a satisfactory resolution to their problem. Problems related to pay and work relations seem to be more soluble than others, but the type of action taken seems to have little bearing on the outcome. Management practices that provide workers with a degree of voice, illustrated here by respondents' awareness of regular meetings between management and workforce, did result in more satisfactory resolutions. Workers with positive attitudes towards unions were also more likely to have obtained a favourable outcome, although the causal mechanism at work here is unclear. At the same time, respondents who failed to achieve a satisfactory outcome were more likely to think that a union would have helped them and to have become willing to unionise as a result of their problem. This is in line with existing theory and evidence on union joining. Theories of unionisation typically stress the importance of having experienced a problem or grievance, which acts as a psychological trigger to unionisation (Wheeler and McClendon 1991). Evidence on why workers joined unions in Britain suggests that as many as 71 per cent did so to get support with a problem at work (Waddington and Whitston 1997: 521). Failure to achieve a satisfactory resolution resulted in significantly higher quit rates, suggesting that there are real costs for employers, employees and perhaps the state (in terms of extra benefit payments) where problems at work are not resolved.

Overall, these results must cast serious doubt about the effectiveness of current systems of internal workplace dispute resolution within an individualised system of regulating the employment relationship. A traditional goal of industrial relations has been to balance fairness with economic efficiency. Whether or not the current system is efficient depends on the balance of costs from higher quit rates compared to the benefits of less regulation. The low rate of satisfactory resolution and the fact that satisfactory resolution was less likely when workers felt that their rights had been violated suggests that the current system is not delivering fairness.

6. Conclusions

This analysis has explored the experience of 501 lower-paid, non-unionised workers' problems at work. The URWS provides evidence on the realities of 'vulnerable' work, which is defined in terms of weakness in the employment relationship. This is caused by absence of collective union representation and poor labour market strength, reflected in 'lower' pay (earning below the median at the time of the survey, 2004). The approach to vulnerability is broader than that of the government, which regards vulnerability as a problem only if it leads to abuse. Using our definition, based on the LFS, 40 per cent of the workforce is 'vulnerable'. The focus on 'problems' and their resolution is concerned with outcomes of vulnerability and not with employers' motives, as is implied in government reference to vulnerability as only relevant if 'an employer exploits that vulnerability' (DTI 2006: 25).

The survey examined who has problems at work and what these are. Initial questioning of the potential sample, before the unionised and those earning above the median were removed, suggests that a large number of workers – 40 per cent of those screened – experience problems at work. The research approach recognised the complexity of the concept of 'problems' at work as partly rooted in subjective norms and expectations, and, taking a broader approach than one which confines problems to legal breaches, combined prompted questions about key problem areas with language that initially referred to wider experiences such as 'difficulties, concerns and worries'. It found that women, ethnic minorities, those with very short job tenure and workers in the private sector, retail, hotels and catering and health and social services and those in small workplaces were more likely to be vulnerable workers with problems at work. However, while in most of these cases, the sample in the URWS is similar to a sub-sample of lower-paid, non-unionised workers in the LFS, there are exceptions, particularly in terms of age, with young workers below 25 years under-represented and 'middle-aged' workers between 45 and 54 years-old over-represented, compared to the low-paid, non-unionised in the labour force. This may be due to sampling error, with, for example, fewer young workers with fixed telephone lines, and/or a higher awareness of 'problems' among older workers. Thus, while the URWS gives an estimate of who has

problems at work, further research, with a larger sample and different methodologies (ideally, a face-to-face survey) is needed.

The most frequent problems experienced in the three years prior to interview were over pay (primarily pay being less than others in similar jobs or pay being incorrect), work relations (overwhelmingly stress, followed by management bullying), workload, job security (primarily a worry that they would lose their job), working hours (mainly unpredictability and working more than agreed), contract or job description (mainly lack of a written job description and being asked to do things not agreed), health and safety, job opportunities, taking time off and discrimination.

In most of these areas, around half felt their problem an infringement of their rights. All suffered multiple problems. When *details of problems* are examined, aspects of work intensification emerge as the main ones: stress, being given too much work without enough time and management taking advantage or bullying. There is some variation in patterns of vulnerability to different problems by workplace, industry and worker characteristics. For example, unskilled workers, the lowest paid and those with only a few months service are the most likely to have pay problems. Workers with disabilities are more likely to suffer six of the ten problems. Work relations problems, such as stress and bullying, are more likely for those with two to five years' service, in health and social work, companies contracted to the public sector and in mixed-sex workplaces. Older women working in mainly female environments, in clerical and administrative jobs and in health, social work and the wider public sector, are most vulnerable to workload problems. Institutional procedures at work to resolve workplace conflict have a lower relationship with reducing the incidence of problems than those to regularly communicate between managers and workers or their representatives.

Having a workplace disciplinary and grievance procedure reduced the likelihood of problems with pay and job security, but not other problems, whereas having regular meetings to discuss workplace issues similarly reduced the chances of problems with pay and job security, but also, discrimination, taking time off and working hours problems. However, neither formal process had any association with reducing the second or third most important problems – work relations and workload.

The URWS was equally concerned with responses to problems as with their nature. Most workers (61 per cent) sought advice about what to do, with women, disabled workers and those who perceived their rights to have been violated significantly more likely to do so. Union experience had no influence on propensity to seek advice. Most sought advice from managers, colleagues and friends and family, and the latter two categories had the most influence. A significant minority also approached Citizens Advice (13 per cent), especially if they felt that their rights were violated, and if their problems concerned discrimination, pay, job security, taking time off and working hours.

The fact that the majority (86 per cent) took some action to resolve their problem, whether it was in their current job or a previous one, is a finding which prompts re-consideration of 'voice' and 'exit' as alternative responses to workplace grievances (Hirschman, 1970). Most workers tried to exercise individual voice by taking action, and while many had left the job with the problem (42 per cent), these were no less likely to have attempted action than those still in the job with the problem. Thus, exit is not the most common response to problems for those without collective voice and, among those who do leave, voice *and* exit co-exist.

However, those who successfully resolved their problem were less likely to have left their job than others. Action was more likely as the number of problems increased and for those with discrimination and pay problems. Among those who took action, the most common strategy was an informal approach to line managers, followed by seeking senior managers (81 and 50 per cent). Only 13 per cent used the formal complaints procedure and recourse to external organisations was rare: 11 per cent went to a CAB, 7 per cent a union. And, confirming wider research that workers with problems are far from litigious (summarised Pollert 2005), only 3 per of workers who took action started employment tribunal proceedings.

An unexpected result of the survey was the degree of *collective* action to resolve problems. This was surprising in view of the fact that, by definition, employment relations for the URWS were individualised and 58 per cent of the sample had never been union members. A quarter of the sample and 28 per cent of those who took any action attempted *collective* solutions, by joining others in a group to try to resolve shared problems. This was the second most important response to

problems after seeking managers. Further, when collective consciousness was further probed, three-quarters of the sample felt their problems were shared by others, and three-quarters of these said they tried to resolve them collectively. This raised the proportion of 'collective actors' to 55 per cent of the sample. While such group action was not highly organised, since most (79 per cent) confined this to discussing common solutions, with 19 per cent going as a group to managers and 13 per cent organising a group meeting, its very existence refutes the assumption that collectivism at the workplace is a thing of the past. However, the reality is that workers lack power. While collective actors were more likely to have an outcome to their problems, they were no more likely to have a satisfactory one. Nevertheless, non-unionised workers are not atomised individuals and informal collectively has the potential of more lasting and effective organisation.

Collectivism was further explored in terms of attitudes to unions. There was no relationship between these and informal collective action, which illustrates the gap between spontaneous collectivism and attitudes towards and propensity to join trade unions. Here a key finding was that while, not surprisingly, very few approached a union for help, views about trade unions were generally positive. Respondents generally agreed that unions make a difference to workers, did not think unions are too weak, too concerned with employers' interests or tend to be militant. Less encouraging for unions will be the finding that respondents would generally prefer to deal with management themselves if they have a problem at work.

In other words, while being generally well disposed towards unions, a significant proportion of respondents did not see them as being particularly relevant to the employment circumstances in which they experienced a problem. However, consciousness is not without contradictions and tensions, as the survey findings show. When asked whether a union would have helped to resolve the problem, 52.5 percent of respondents thought so and 40 percent felt that experience of problems at work made them want to become a member of a trade union, a figure in line with other research (Charlwood 2002; 2003). Respondents were more likely to want to unionise if they had formerly been a union member, believed that a union would have helped them to deal with their problem and had generally positive attitudes towards unions.

The most striking outcome of the research is the extremely poor success rate of internal workplace resolution to problems, despite the fact that workers make many efforts to solve them. Almost half (47 per cent) of workers who took steps to resolve difficulties had no results at all and just 18.6 per cent (16 per cent of all with problems) had a satisfactory outcome. Type of action had little bearing on obtaining an outcome. Problems that respondents perceived to be violations of their employment rights were still less likely to be satisfactorily resolved. Interestingly, when workplaces had mechanisms for regular consultation and communication between employees and management, problems were more likely to be resolved, and to be resolved satisfactorily. However, respondents who had a formal grievance procedure were not significantly more likely to get a conclusion or a satisfactory resolution than those who worked in a workplace without one.

Considering the broad approach to vulnerability taken here, the low success rate of workplace resolution to problems is alarming. If a narrower definition of vulnerable workers were used, such as the TUC calculation of one-in-five employees, based on the bottom third of the income distribution and non-coverage by collective agreements (TUC 2006: 7), it is likely that the resolution-rate would be even poorer. And if the government's approach were adopted, confining the vulnerable to those suffering under ignorant and/or unscrupulous employers, then the results would arguably be worse still.

Furthermore, young workers, probably the least informed and most insecure, were under-represented in the URWS. In other words, our results err, if anything, on the optimistic side.

Overall, these results must cast serious doubt about the effectiveness of the system of regulating the employment relationship for the majority of workers – the non-unionised – and expose the double disadvantage of the vulnerable: not only do they suffer from multiple problems at work, but when they try to resolve them, the overwhelming majority fail. The low rate of satisfactory outcome and the fact that satisfactory outcomes are less likely when workers feel that their rights have been violated suggests that the current system of individual workplace problem resolution is not delivering fairness at work.

Technical Appendix

A1. Problems at work: theoretical and definitional issues

The meaning of 'problems at work' is a complex issue. Even in legal terms, definitions of, for example, 'reasonable' or 'unreasonable' behaviour by a worker or employer are open to debate at tribunals and appeals. Just as sociologically, there is a vast literature on interpretations of job satisfaction, the experience of work and employment relations, so there is likely to be debate on what constitutes a 'problem' at work. A 'problem' may be considered to be something 'unfair' at a very broad level (e.g. a 'fair day's work for a fair day's pay') without any legal connotation.

In this project, we wished to glean information on experiences which caused worry, difficulty, distress or a sense of unfairness, and might lead to strategies to deal with or resolve the problem. This latter criterion is important, since the project's aim was not only to capture the problem(s), but the possible routes to support and advice, non-action where this was the response, and the reasons for these. Thus the problem could be a 'critical incident', or a chronic situation. At the same time, the conceptualisation required responses which did not depend on workers' knowledge of their *rights*. Thus, the approach differed from the DTI's first study of awareness of employment rights (Meager *et al.* 2002: 174-176), which asked respondents about experience of 'any problems...in relation to your rights at work' and found that only 16 per cent did so. It was thus not confined to *justiciable* problems (Genn 1999). We wished to identify a broad range of problems as subjectively sensed, and to separate out whether or not the respondent felt that there was an entitlement to rights, which these problems infringed. We include a separate question later in the questionnaire as to whether the respondent thought that their 'problem' infringed their rights.

The focus was on a *substantial* difficulty or worry which could be considered detrimental to satisfactory work experience, and might lead to action. This required testing.

Testing the concept of 'problem'

A person's perception of a 'problem' depends on a threshold of tolerance and expectations. The research design considered the language, tone, place and sequencing of the concept of 'problem' in the questionnaire, as well as whether 'problems' were single or multiple, ongoing or past, and might change in recall as the questionnaire progressed. The final strategy to define 'problems' at work was a combination of varying the wording and using prompts.

Initial informal cognitive testing of the term 'problem' indicated that the words 'problem at work' in an opening question could be too 'hard' and eliminate potential problems. Probing showed a number of issues associated with workload, irregular or incorrect pay, bullying etc. were experienced by some pilot respondents, but were not expressed as 'problems'. This is because of low norms and expectations about what is acceptable at work among some workers. Many people may also be unwilling to admit that they have 'a problem', since it may imply 'weakness'. The concept needs to acknowledge that for many people in 'vulnerable' employment (at the lower end of the labour market), the subjective threshold of a 'problem' may be quite high, due to habituation to persistent difficulties. Thus, any attempt to capture 'problems' at work needs to be sensitive to different perceptions and coping strategies, ranging from consent, compliance, resignation, or various forms of anxiety about or objection to what is experienced. At the same time, there may be many who would enumerate daily irritations which were considered as trivial for this research and which we wished to eliminate.

Defining and narrowing ‘problems’ in the survey

- At the first stage of identifying potential respondents, we avoided the word ‘problem’ and asked whether a person had encountered any ‘*difficulty, concern or worry*’ at work in the past three years.
- Once speaking to a potential respondent, we wished to tighten the definition of ‘problems’ to those we were interested in, without deterring those who were put off by the term ‘problem’. We did so by introducing the word ‘problem’, but retaining ‘difficulties and concerns’ and then following this with prompts:

‘Have any of the following been a difficulty, concern or problem to you in any job you have had in the past three years?’

This was followed by a read-out list of problems:

Table A1: List of problems

<i>Pay, such as not being paid the correct amount, not being paid regularly, or not receiving pay for holidays or overtime, etc.</i>
<i>Job Security, such as fear of unfair dismissal or being forced to quit</i>
<i>Opportunities</i>
<i>Discrimination towards yourself</i>
<i>Taking time-off</i>
<i>Working hours</i>
<i>Workload</i>
<i>Health and Safety</i>
<i>Concerns relating to your contract or job description</i>
<i>Work relations, such as stress or bullying</i>
<i>None of the above</i>

Cognitive testing showed that most of the problems in the read-out were straightforward and easily understood by respondents. An exception was ‘pay’. So that respondents would not respond that they had problems about pay simply because they wanted to be paid more, the read-out was extended with further prompts (see above). A second ambiguity became apparent only with piloting. Here, it became clear that a far larger proportion of respondents reported problems with ‘job security’ than for other problems. While this may reflect a valid sociological observation of a general perception of insecurity

among this segment of the workforce, in the context of the questionnaire, this formulation did not allow us to distinguish between a broad worry and more immediate threats to security, which we were interested in. To clarify our meaning, further prompts were added (see above). The effect was to reduce the percentage of respondents responding to this category.

- Narrowing the problem or problems to one job.

After identifying a problem or group of problems, the interviewee was asked to think about only a *main* problem and to focus on the *one job* where the problem occurred. This job was then screened for the other criteria (earnings, and being 'unrepresented'). If the respondent was eligible by these other two criteria, he/she continued to the main-stage of the questionnaire.

- As the questionnaire progressed, once the respondents had begun thinking about a 'concern, worry or problem', the terminology became simpler and either referred to 'concern' or 'problem'. This was because the main conceptual hurdle had been passed, and we wished to simplify language.

The definition of 'problems' at work thus captured matters which expressed workers' vulnerability in the employment relationship in different ways – whether over pay, workload and other working conditions, stress, unfair treatment and job insecurity. These are areas in which trade unions traditionally offer defence. Research has previously found that protection from problems at work is the chief reason non-unionised workers join unions (Waddington and Whitston, 1997). However, little is known about details of such problems, or how vulnerable workers deal with them. Uncovering these processes is the objective of the URWS.

A2. Sample and methods

The main objective of the research was to explore the means by which vulnerable workers seek to resolve problems encountered in the workplace. For our purposes, potentially vulnerable workers were defined as those who earn at or below median earnings (i.e. half the workforce), because earnings are a measure of labour market power and those who were not union members, because union membership goes some way to giving workers the resources to protect themselves against infringements of their employment rights, so reducing vulnerability.

The first challenge was to construct a sample of these workers in Britain. This was done through a mixture of regionally representative random and purposive sampling. A telephone survey was used because this method was felt to be the best way of allowing a reasonably representative sample to be constructed, given the resources available. According to the General Household Survey (2004), 92 per cent of UK households have a fixed line telephone, so were potentially able to participate. Using 'random digit dialling', a computer generated regionally stratified random sample of 23,130 telephone numbers was contacted. This included ex-directory and invalid numbers, but excluded households that had signed up for the Telephone Preference Service (TPS)⁶, which may introduce some bias into the survey if households signing up to the TPS differ from those which do not.

Note that some of the most vulnerable workers, for example the young and migrant workers living in short-term shared accommodation, are likely to be excluded from a telephone survey.

The first survey stage was to find households with a worker who had been in employment in the past three years. One concern of the survey team was that a telephone survey may over represent those most likely to be at home, for example the recently retired, part-time workers, the unemployed and recently redundant and those unable to work through illness, disability or injury.

⁶ Telephone users can subscribe to the TPS if they do not wish to receive unsolicited 'cold' marketing calls.

Several steps were taken to minimise this risk:

- The names in the sample were entered in batches of 4,000, and subsequent batches were only used after the current batch had been called numerous times.
- Each number was called at least eight times.
- Each number was called at different times of the day. Calls were made on weekday evenings from 4pm to 9pm and on weekends from 10am to 4pm.

From the random sample of households with workers, the survey switched to purposive sampling of low paid, unrepresented workers who had experienced problems, within the sampled household. To do this a short screener questionnaire was used to identify which members of the household fitted our criteria for participation in the full survey. Because of resource constraints, proxy respondents were used to identify members of the household who might match our criteria. They were asked if they, or someone else in the household, had experienced difficulties, concerns or worries in a job during the last three years, had been earning less than the median pay⁷ and had not been covered by a trade union at the time.

Fieldwork, conducted by the survey organisation IFF, was conducted over a six-week period from October to November 2004. Of the 23,130 dialled phone numbers, 21 per cent were unobtainable, leaving 18,270 real phone numbers. Of these, 47.6 per cent refused to participate in the survey, which may have introduced a further element of non-response bias into the data. Overall 9,574 households (52.4 per cent of those contacted) agreed to participate in the survey. Just under half of these households (48.7 per cent) had *workers* who might be interviewed. Of these 4,666 households with workers in them, over half (57.8 per cent) had to be excluded, because they either did not have a concern or worry at work, or they earned above the median, or they were covered by a union. We could not differentiate which of these criteria eliminated them – and there may have been some with problems, but who failed the other criteria.

⁷ The questionnaire used Computer Assisted Telephone interviewing which provided interviewers with the salary amount which was the median for the region dialled at the time of the survey (hourly, weekly or annual pay).

At this stage, there were 1,971 workers to be screened. *Of these, almost half, (48.6 per cent) had experienced some of the ten problems which were listed during the past three years at work.* Thus, if we include workers earning above the median as well as those who are covered by a union, *around half have experienced problems at work, according to this survey.* This figure is similar to the government's second commissioned survey of employees' knowledge of employment rights, which, unlike its first study, did not ask about 'rights' but instead used cards with prompts on areas of 'problems', similar to our own approach, and found that 42 per cent of employees had experienced a problem in the previous five years (Casebourne *et al.* 2006: 98). Since our focus was on the 'vulnerable' we had to exclude those covered by a union and earning above the median pay threshold, *leaving us with a sample of 501 lower paid, unrepresented workers with problems.* This was just over half (52.3 per cent) of all the sampled workers with problems and a quarter (25.4 per cent) of the 1,971 workers who were screened (Table A2).

Table A2: Screening and exclusion stages of unrepresented worker sample achievement

<i>Dialled Numbers</i>	23,130
Unobtainable:	4,860
- Dead number/fax/unobtainable number	4,165
- Not available in fieldwork period	695
Total contacts made	18,270
Refused	8,696
Agreed to be screened for interview	9,574
Screened out as no workers	4,908
Agreed to be screened for interview - households with workers	4,666
Screened out as not fitting sample criteria, comprising:	2,695
- self screened out*	1,602
- household proxy screened out*	1,093
Screened out not fitting sample criteria as % households with workers	57%
<i>Agreed further interview</i>	1,971
<i>Total with none of 10 cited problems in 3 years</i>	1,013
<i>Total with no problems as % of those who agreed interview</i>	51%
<i>Total with some problems and agreed interview</i>	958
<i>Total with some problems as % those who agreed interview</i>	49%
<i>Earned over limit</i>	322
<i>Earned over limit as % total with problem, eligible for interview.</i>	34%
Total eligible by 'problems' and 'earning limit'	636
<i>Total who failed non-union criteria</i>	135
<i>Total who failed non-union criteria as % those eligible for interview by 'problem' and 'earning limit'</i>	21.2%
Total interviewed who passed all criteria	501
Total interviewed as % those who agreed interview left after screening	25.4%

*These eliminated themselves or eliminated others in the household because they thought they or others in the household who worked had no problems at work, and/or earned above the earnings maximum for their region and/or worked where they were 'covered by a trade union'.

A3. Comparing the Unrepresented Worker Survey with the Labour Force Survey

We now go on to investigate how this sample compares with the profile of the workforce as depicted by the Labour Force Survey (LFS) in the same year. Table A3 summarises the characteristics of the 'vulnerable worker' respondents in the URWS, and contrasts these with the workforce as a whole and with all lower paid non-unionised workers, as revealed by the 2004 Labour Force Survey (LFS). Chi squared tests were used to investigate whether differences between the URWS 'vulnerable workers' sample and the LFS were statistically significant or not. Table A3 shows two comparisons. First, whether the characteristics of participants in the URWS are significantly different or not from the LFS as a whole (*i.e.* how the URWS is likely to differ from the population of UK workers in general). Differences may arise because workers with a particular characteristic may be more likely to be low paid and unrepresented or because they may be more likely to experience problems. Second, to establish which of these factors explains variation between the sample and the workforce as a whole, the table compares the sample (*i.e.* lower paid unrepresented workers with problems) to the wider population of lower paid unrepresented workers, as revealed by the LFS. This distinguishes those who report problems at work (the low paid, unorganised with problems who entered the URWS) from the low paid, unorganised in general, and identifies whether there are significant differences. Overall, 40 per cent of employees in the LFS fell into the low-paid unrepresented category.

Table A3: Comparison of the characteristics of low-paid unrepresented workers with problems with all unrepresented workers and the workforce as a whole

	<i>Vulnerable workers: unrepresented workers survey</i>	<i>Low paid, unrepresented workers (Labour Force Survey)</i>	<i>All workers (Labour Force Survey)</i>
<i>Individual characteristics</i>			
Male	39.12	42.14	53.77***
Female	60.88	57.86	46.23***
<i>Age</i>			
<25	16.53	29.71***	14.27**
25 - 34	20.36	19.63	21.83
35 - 44	23.79	20.1	26.32
45 - 54	24.4	15.89***	21.91
55+	14.92	14.86	15.67
<i>Highest educational qualification¹</i>			
None	14.11	14.84	10.13
NVQ level 1 equivalent	5.44	19.69	13.88
GCSE/ NVQ level 2 equivalent	31.05	20.87	15.36
A level/ NVQ level 3 equivalent	24.19	22.72	22.24
Higher education	21.77	13.34	30.25
Other	3.23	-	9.14
<i>Ethnicity</i>			
Non-white ethnic minorities	8.78	6.42***	7.07**
White	91.22	93.58***	92.93**
<i>Job characteristics</i>			
<i>Sector²</i>			
Public sector	17.67	15.87	24.19***
Private sector	82.33	84.13	75.81***
<i>Industry</i>			
Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	1.44	1.61	1.34
Manufacturing	14.43	13.42	13.57
Construction	3.3	6.9***	8.07***
Retail, wholesale and distribution	18.76	25.69***	13.45**
Hotels and restaurants	7.01	8.75	4.35***
Transport and communications	4.95	5.27	6.75
Financial intermediation	3.51	2.7	4.18
Other business services	9.07	8.97	11.46
Public administration	5.98	3.34***	7.04
Education	8.04	6.42	9.09
Health and social services	17.11	11.38***	12.09***
Other community services	6.39	6.52	5.6
<i>Workplace size</i>			

	<i>Vulnerable workers: unrepresented workers survey</i>	<i>Low paid, unrepresented workers (Labour Force Survey)</i>	<i>All workers (Labour Force Survey)</i>
<10 employees	21.76	29.87***	19.01**
10 - 24 employees	20.39	18.23	12.63***
25 – 49 employees	14.87	15.25	12.66*
50 – 249 employees	28.72	21.22***	21.48***
250 – 499 employees	6.11	6.3	7.11
>499 employees	8.15	8.31	15.75***
<i>Occupation</i>			
Managers and senior professionals	6.68	5.8	14.95***
Professionals	4.05	2.22**	12.41***
Associate professional and technical occupations	7.89	5.92*	13.79***
Administrative and secretarial occupations	18.42	17.53	12.62***
Skilled manual occupations	7.49	9.94	11.55***
Personal services occupations	16.40	11.4***	7.61***
Sales and customer services occupations	12.96	16.17	7.85***
Semi-skilled occupations	9.51	8.69	7.48*
Un-skilled occupations	16.60	22.3***	11.67***
Full-time job	78.34	61.97***	76.11
Part-time job	21.66	38.03***	23.89
Non-standard employment contract	11.45	7.77***	5.27***

Sources: 3rd quarter (autumn) of 2004 Labour Force Survey and Unrepresented Workers Survey

1. Responses here are not strictly comparable as the LFS asks a much more detailed set of questions about qualifications. Because of these differences, no significance tests were performed on these variables

2. Differences between the URWS and LFS here may arise from differences in the questions. The URWS asks if workers work for private contractors in the public sector, respondents who are categorised in the URWS column as being in the private sector. In the LFS workers in these jobs may classify themselves as working in the public sector.

* - Difference compared to the unrepresented workers sample is statistically significant at the 10 per cent level or better.

** - Difference compared to the unrepresented workers sample is statistically significant at the 5 per cent level or better.

*** - Difference compared to the unrepresented workers sample is statistically significant at the 1 per cent level or better.

Results are based on Chi² tests.

The key points which emerge from this analysis and further sample characteristics are discussed below.

Gender

Female workers were significantly more likely to be present in the URWS than in the workforce as a whole, although there was little difference between the proportions of men and women in the URWS compared to all low-paid and unrepresented workers. This coheres with other studies of low paid workers with problems at work, for example the West Midlands Employment and Low Pay Unit found that women comprised 58 per cent of callers to its employment helpline in 2001/2002 (Russell and Eyers 2002).

In the URWS, we looked at the gender distribution of the sample in more detail. We found that there was a similar distribution of the sexes across workplace sizes. Men were more likely to work in manufacturing and women in services, although there were similar proportions of both sexes working in retail. Women were also more likely to work in the public and voluntary sectors and men in the private sector. Around half of men and women worked in gender segregated workplaces with co-workers of their own sex. Around a third of both men and women worked in mixed gender workplaces. This gender segregation was partly related to occupational segregation, with more women working in administrative occupations and more men working in skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled manual occupations.

Age

Young workers (aged 24 and under) are more likely to be low paid and unrepresented than workers in other age groups, but they were significantly less likely to have participated in the URWS. Conversely workers in the 45–54 age category were significantly more likely to appear in the URWS – this may reflect the fact that older workers are more likely to perceive themselves as experiencing problems than younger workers – perhaps because they have different norms and expectations of the treatment that they should receive from their employers. There may also be a methodological issue, with younger workers less likely to be contactable by fixed telephone lines.

Ethnicity

Ethnic minority workers were significantly more likely to be present in the URWS than their presence in the wide labour force and among low-paid, unrepresented workers in the labour force, which suggests a higher occurrence of problems. Therefore white workers had a lower presence in the URWS than their equivalents in the labour force and with the wider labour force.

Industry and sector

Participants in the URWS were more likely to work in retail than the workforce as a whole, but less likely than the proportion of all low paid, unrepresented workers in this industry. Workers in construction were also less likely to have participated in the URWS than the LFS or the low paid, non-unionised in the LFS . On the other hand, workers in health and social services were more likely to report problems and so participate in the URWS. Workers in the hotels and restaurants sector were more likely to be low paid and unrepresented than the workforce as a whole, but no more likely to have problems than other low paid and unrepresented workers. There were significantly fewer low-paid unorganised workers in the public sector, in both the sample (i.e. those with problems) and among the lower paid and unrepresented than in the labour force as a whole. This largely reflects the higher unionisation of the public sector. However, note that the inclusion in the sample of the voluntary sector and of workers in private companies contracted to the public sector makes comparison between the URWS and the LFS, which does not ask these questions, problematic (see Table A3 note 2).

Workplace size

42 per cent of the sample worked in workplaces employing fewer than 25 people, which in part reflects low union membership density levels among those in small workplaces – 18 per cent compared with 34 per cent in all workplaces (Kersley *et al.* 2006: 110). Respondents were more likely to be in the smallest workplaces (<10 employees) than the workforce as a whole, reflecting the fact that small workplaces are less likely to be covered by union recognition (Kersley *et al.* 2006) and more likely to pay low wages (Low Pay Commission 2007: 73). However, lower paid unrepresented workers in the smallest workplaces were less likely to report problems than their incidence in the labour force would lead us to

expect. This is perhaps unsurprising given that job satisfaction is also greater in small workplaces (Rose 2005)⁸. Workers in very large workplaces (500+ employees) were also significantly less likely to report problems, while workers in medium sized workplaces (50 – 249) employees were significantly more likely to report problems.

Occupation

Managers and senior professionals were less likely to be low paid and unrepresented than the workforce as a whole, but there was little difference between the proportion of lower paid unrepresented managers and senior administrators with problems (*i.e.* those in the URWS) and the proportion of lower paid, non-unionised managers and senior administrators in the labour force. By contrast, a higher proportion of professionals and associate professionals reported problems than equivalent lower paid and unorganised workers in these professions. The same was also true for workers in personal and professional service occupations. Conversely, unskilled manual workers were less likely to report problems.

Contractual terms

Full-time workers had a similar presence to the labour force in general and a higher one than among low paid, unorganised workers in the LFS, while part-time workers had a similar presence to the general labour force but a lower one than among lower paid unorganised workers in the labour force. Those with 'non-standard' contracts, including temporary and agency workers, had a significantly higher presence in the URWS sample than in either the general labour force or among the lower paid, unorganised in the LFS. They were divided between 4 per cent Fixed Term contract workers, 4 per cent Agency workers and 2 per cent Casual or Seasonal workers ('others' making up the rest). Men and women were fairly evenly spread between these contractual conditions.

⁸ 1. It is important here not to conflate workplace size with firm size. Some small workplaces will be small firms, but some will be part of larger organisations.

Job tenure

A very high proportion of low paid, unrepresented workers with problems (48.3 per cent) had been in their job for less than a year when they experienced their problems and (37.6 per cent) had been in post for less than 6 months. Young workers were more likely to have been in a job for less than a year: those under 22 years old comprised 9 per cent of the sample, but 15 per cent of those with less than a year's service, and those between 22-29 years were also slightly over-represented here (17 per cent of the sample, but 20 per cent of those with below a year's tenure).

Pay

The pay threshold of those earning at or below the median wage was £425 per week for London and the South East and £341 for the rest of the country.⁹ Hourly pay was calculated on the basis of information given on working hours and median pay was £5.77 per hour. It should be noted that the hourly pay bands of vulnerable workers started at an extremely low wage, well below the Minimum Wage. These were: Band 1: £1.97-£4.92; Band 2: £4.93-£5.76; Band 3: £5.77-£7.20; Band 4: £7.21-£12.00.¹⁰

Just under half the sample (45 per cent) were full-time workers earning in the top two pay quartiles. Put another way, 96 per cent of the top two pay quartiles were full-time workers. Nevertheless, over a quarter of the sample (26 per cent) were full-time workers earning in the bottom two quartiles – a substantial minority. Interestingly, similar percentages of the sample earning in the bottom quartile, which was close to, or below the minimum wage, were full-time and part-time workers (11 per cent and 12 per cent respectively). The pay distribution showed the predictable disadvantage of part-time workers: 51 per cent of part-time workers (based on self-reporting) were in the lowest pay quartile, 31 per cent in the second to bottom, and only 8 per cent were in the top two. By contrast, 59 per

⁹ This was calculated as the weighted average of gross median earnings for 2001, 2002 and 2003 (Labour Force Survey). This is because a threshold had to apply to a job in the last 3 years and the survey was conducted in 2004. The question was asked in hourly, weekly and annual terms and calculated for part-time workers.

¹⁰ Note: information needed to calculate hourly pay was available for 460 respondents – 92 per cent of the sample. Pay referred to the job with the problem, which could be any one experienced in the previous 3 years. The UK National Minimum Wage for adults over 21 was: £4.84 in 2004, £4.50 in 2003, £4.20 in 2002 and £4.10 in 2001. For young workers (18-21) it was £4.10 in 2004, £3.80 in 2003, £3.60 in 2002 and £3.50 in 2001. In 2004 it was £3.00 for 16-17 year olds.

cent of full-time workers were in the top two quartiles, 19 per cent in the second to bottom, and 14 per cent in the bottom one.

Women's earnings disadvantage was apparent: 25 per cent of women were in the bottom quartile band compared with 19 per cent of men. There was some gender convergence in Band 2, with 23 per cent of women compared to 20 per cent of men, but divergence in Band 3, with only 19 per cent of women but 31 per cent of men. The two roughly equalised at the top with 23 per cent of women and 24 per cent of men.

Using self-definition on full-time and part-time work, of the 90 part-time women workers for whom hourly pay data was available, 57 per cent were in the bottom quartile, 32 per cent in the next to bottom, but only 7 per cent in the second to top and 3 per cent in the top quartile. Put another way, women comprised 85 per cent of part-time workers in the bottom quartile and 78 per cent in the second one. The concentration of low pay here is in keeping with widespread research on the disadvantage of part-time women workers.¹¹

White workers were slightly under-represented in the third and top pay quartile (89 per cent of each) and over-represented in the bottom one (92 per cent) and the second quartile (94 per cent). Non-White workers were slightly over-represented in the top two quartiles (11 per cent in each) and under-represented in the bottom band (8 per cent) and the second (6 per cent).

Union background

Union background referred to a respondent's union membership history at the time of the job in which the problem was experienced 'Never members' comprised the majority of the sample (58 per cent), with 34 per cent having been members at some time. Just 6 per cent were members at the time of the problem and were unrepresented in having no union recognition or representation.

¹¹ Women were 78 per cent of part time workers in employment in 2004 (Labour Force Survey Historical Supplement, no date). After the release of New Earnings Survey Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) figures in 2005, the Equal Opportunities Commission noted that part-time women workers earned almost 40 per cent less than full-time men. <http://www.eoc.org.uk/Default.aspx?page=17988&lang=en>, accessed 15 March 2006.

A4. Statistical analysis methods

Testing for statistical significance

One of the things that we are interested in trying to understand in this report is whether or not particular groups of workers are more or less likely to have experienced different types of problems, for example, are women more likely to have experienced problems with taking time off than men? However, because we are analyzing a random sample drawn from a much larger population, we cannot be sure that any differences we observe in our data-set are real differences within the population, or differences that reflect a difference between our sample and the population as a whole and which might disappear if we based our analysis on a different random sample. Consequently we use tests of statistical significance (chi squared tests on cross tabulations and t tests to investigate differences in means) to investigate the probability that any differences between groups are 'real' differences that we would observe in the population of employees as a whole. We only comment on differences between groups if there is a reasonably good probability (90 per cent or better) that the differences that we observe will be replicated in the population as a whole. Therefore, when we use the phrases 'different from' or 'significantly different' we mean that there is a statistically significant difference between the results.

Regression analysis

Regression analysis is an econometric technique (econometrics is the mathematical branch of economics) which looks at the average relationships between two variables, while holding the effects of other variables constant.

For example, in this paper, we are interested in the relationship between problems and outcomes. Are some problems more likely to result in a satisfactory outcome than others? It may well be that there is a statistically significant relationship between pay problems and a satisfactory outcome. However, it may also be the case that men are more likely to experience pay problems, and men are also more likely to experience a satisfactory outcome. If this is the case, which is more important in achieving a satisfactory outcome, gender or type of problem? Regression analysis allows us to identify which of these relationships are more important. It also tells us if any of the relationships between variables

are statistically significant (i.e. have a high chance of being replicated in the population as a whole rather than being an artefact of our sample). In the chapters where regression analysis is the primary method of analysis, we only comment on results where the relationships between variables are statistically significant. The results that we report have also been subjected to extensive sensitivity analyses to check that they are not sensitive to small changes in model specification. Because most of our dependent variables are categorical, *i.e.* the answers to the questions: whether or not a worker had a particular type of problem, whether they took action etc., have yes or no answers, the specific form of regression analysis used was probit analysis. To economise on space, we have not reproduced the results of these analyses in detailed tabular form, but full results are available from the authors on request.

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