

The rhythm of the night – Night work and the destabilisation of social reproduction

Sian Moore (Anglia Ruskin University) and Ruth Ballardie (University of Greenwich)

Abstract

The paper locates contemporary night work in Social Reproduction Theory. It makes an empirical contribution, illuminating Fraser's conceptual 'crisis of social reproduction', rooted in worker experience and invigorated through testimony. Drawing on interviews with night workers, largely from the rail and postal sectors, it evidences the compression of social reproductive time. Firstly, nightwork undermines the replenishment of the human body and labour power and the qualitative nature of time for life as a social being. Secondly workers preference for nightwork to facilitate caring responsibilities confirms the withdrawal of state and employer support for childcare and capitalism's impulse to lower the cost of the reproduction of labour. Those who cannot afford to pay for childcare absorb these costs at an individual level by working unsocial hours where they struggle to combine productive and domestic labour within the 24-hour day -the subjugation of social reproduction to production under neoliberal capitalism.

Key words

Social reproduction, nightwork, working time, gender, shift work

Introduction

Over one quarter (27%) of the UK workforce, roughly 8.7 million people, were night-time workers in 2022 (ONS, 2022), with the proportion of female night-time workers increasing over the previous decade from 42% to 44%¹. The disruption of the body clock precipitated by night shifts led the UK Health and Safety Executive (HSE) to conclude that 'only a limited number of workers can successfully adapt to nightwork' (2006). A substantial international body of work has demonstrated that shift work, and nightwork in particular, are linked to a wide range of mental and physical health conditions (Torquati et al., 2019; Moreno et al., 2019). Disruption to circadian rhythms, sleep deprivation and social desynchronisation (Moreno, 2019) have significant negative effects on night workers, but also on their relationships, families and social lives (Arlinghaus, 2019).

This paper explores the relationship between nightwork and social reproduction, evidencing the dynamic between productive and reproductive work wherein 'the reproduction of waged labour is embedded in capitalist production' (Camp-Calvet et al., 2024:289). It presents research on a sample of those working permanent nights, or nights as part of shift patterns, largely in the rail and postal sectors. It aimed firstly to understand the experiences and perceptions of night workers and the impact on their physical and mental health, secondly to explore the impact of changes in work and nightwork regimes and thirdly to interrogate workers' preferences for nightwork and the factors that may influence their 'choices'. While there were shared experiences, it emerged that the sample fell into two broad groups; firstly, older workers who had worked nights over decades, who articulated intensified regimes of nightwork and reflected on the impact on their aging bodies. The second group was of younger workers, both female and male, who worked nights largely to accommodate childcare responsibilities. These two broad groups evoke Marx's cognizance of both capital and

¹ ONS deems someone a night-time worker if they "usually" work either in the evening or the night, irrespective of whether they also "usually" work in the day. Night-time workers decreased by 700,000 between 2016 and 2022. (<https://www.ons.gov.uk/businessindustryandtrade/business/activitysizeandlocation/articles/thenighttimeeconomyuk/2022#:~:text=In%20this%20article%2C%20someone%20is,%22usually%22%20work%20in%20the%20day>)

worker needs for social reproduction, firstly for the rejuvenation of the working body and secondly for the reproduction of future generations of workers. Marxist Feminist Social Reproduction Theory (SRT) has further interrogated how the paid workforce is produced and the reliance of capitalism upon the paid and unpaid work of women. Informed by such theory, this paper focusses on the reproduction of paid labour, how paid and unpaid labour are mutually constituted in the working lives of women and men and the way that each defines the other, while evidencing Nancy Fraser's (2017) concept of a crisis of social reproduction rooted in financialised capitalism.

Ruiz Castro et al. identify three intertwined processes that (re)produce labour power; activities that replenish the worker outside work (e.g., food, affection, care, recovery); activities that sustain and care for non-workers outside paid work (e.g., childcare, elder care) and the reproduction of future workers via childbirth (2024). The testimony of night workers illustrate the impact of nightwork on the first two processes (with implications for the third); firstly on workers' bodies and mental health and the capacity for replenishment. Secondly how nightwork facilitates childcare, while simultaneously threatening the quality of caring relationships. The paper addresses both themes, and the relationship between them, in the context of changes to work within the industries examined.

A key insight of Marxist SRT is the contradictory relationship between production and social reproduction; capital depends upon the latter while repudiating it in terms of costs (Vogel, 2013). This produces tensions for workers between the need to labour to enable social reproduction, but within regimes of work that negatively impact on their capacity for social reproduction. Firstly, the testimonies of night workers about the impact of nightwork on their bodies confirm that it is destructive of their capacity for social reproduction, undermining basic biological replenishment in terms of sleep, rest and nourishment. Workers' experiences vividly evidenced what Apostolidis has called 'the compression of social-reproductive time' (2023:1), recalling Marx's definition of the time for social reproduction in its widest terms as 'Time for education, for intellectual development, for the fulfilling of social functions and for social intercourse, for the free-play of his² bodily and mental activity'. For Apostolidis time has two dimensions, with the qualitative nature of time as human experience colliding with the quantitative regimes of clock (work) time. Secondly, worker testimonies demonstrate how the absence of accessible and affordable childcare provision and family friendly working practices inform an apparent 'preference' for night and shift working. In particular they could fit work around 'the school run' without financial costs. However, bodily depletion along with the social desynchronisation associated with intensified regimes of nightwork negatively impacted on both the quantitative time available for engaging in family relationships and the quality of their time in caring relationships with children. Nightwork exemplifies the complex inter-relationships and contradictions between work (production) and social reproduction, both enabling and constraining childcare and drawing males into regimes of care.

The prevalence of childcare as a driver of nightwork for both women and men, evokes Nancy Fraser's (2017) 'crisis of social reproduction', part of capitalism's social reproductive contradiction, but specific to the financialised neoliberal form of capitalism where the drive for unlimited accumulation threatens the necessary reproductive processes upon which it depends, including the maintenance of households and broader communities. For Fine, neoliberalism is a stage of capitalism where state intervention facilitates 'the pervasive presence of financialisation in economic and social reproduction' (2024:5). A key feature of neoliberalism involves deregulation, privatisation and marketisation to promote financialisation (Adkins and Dever, 2016) – which are characteristics of the sectors featured in this research. Worker testimonies indicated that the ensuing intensification of work and of nightwork regimes have eroded conditions for night workers even though (in this study) they have been historically covered by collective bargaining. This research identifies the concrete manifestations of neoliberal capitalism in nightwork and its impacts upon workers and their families.

² The worker is defined as male, despite Marx's consideration in Capital Volume 1 of female and child labour.

Fraser (2017) argues that financialised capitalism involves the convergence of female and male labour market participation rates, assuming an ideal two-earner household model, alongside state disinvestment from social welfare, including publicly funded care. For Fraser and Federici (2020) care has been externalised onto families and communities. The fall in real wages over recent decades makes it difficult to support a family on a single salary and generally entails an increase in the number of hours of paid work required to support a household. In fact, government statistics (ONS, 2022) conclude that the increase in female night-time workers has been driven by an increase in female full-time workers and decline in female part-time night-time workers. The shift to the neoliberal ideal of the 'two-earner family' (and away from a welfare state model based on the ideal of a male breadwinner) comes with a distinctive set of gender and family ideals, although the Female Principal Breadwinner is a reality. For working parents this has had significant implications for the management of childcare.

The paper provides the contemporary context for nightwork and implications for working bodies, childcare and family relationships and their imbrication. It then sets out the impact of nightwork on social reproduction, theorising the relationship between production and reproduction with reference to Marxist approaches to the concept of 'the body' and Marxist Feminist Social Reproduction Theory (SRT) including Fraser's (2017) crisis of social reproduction. After discussing methods, the paper moves to findings, firstly specifying the organisational contexts defined by privatisation and marketisation and how these have shaped work and regimes of nightwork. It then documents the impacts on night workers' physical and mental capacity for work and time for replenishment. The paper moves on to consider the contradictory impact of nightwork on childcare in the context of Fraser's crisis of social reproduction. This dual focus (replenishment and childcare) enables the linkages between nightwork, gendered bodies and care to be explicated, before discussing conclusions.

Context

Impact of night and shift work on workers

Labour power is an embodied capacity, and this has a particular resonance in nightwork. There is strong scientific evidence, with causal biological and social pathways, that shift work and nightwork are associated with negative health outcomes in relation to cardiovascular disease, gastro-intestinal and metabolic disorders. These pathways include circadian rhythm misalignment; insufficient sleep and social desynchronisation (Moreno et al 2019). Nightwork is classified as a probable carcinogen (IARC, 2020).

A common finding in the literature is that shift and night workers tend to have poorer diets and more limited physical exercise compared to day workers, which can exacerbate the negative impacts of nightwork on workers' health (Moreno et al., 2019). The research on circadian rhythm misalignment has identified its impact on hormones related to appetite and to glucose levels. In addition, sleep deprivation is associated with preferences for high fat food and lower levels of energy expenditure (Moreno et al., 2019). These can lead to overeating and reduce the body's capacity to process meals and when combined with insufficient exercise are likely to contribute to the propensity for obesity, heart disease and metabolic disorders such as diabetes.

Shift-working increases the risk of divorce or separation (Arlinghaus et al., 2019). This effect appears worst for both male and female parents working nightshifts, with one study of US workers indicating a six-fold increase in risk of divorce for men and three-fold increase for women (Presser, 2000). Lambert et al. (2023) found that non-standard work schedules increased time-bound work-life conflict more for women than men, with early morning and evening work disrupting socially valuable time for women and weekend work disrupting it for both men and women. This may be because women tend to take more responsibility for routine, daily and less flexible forms of domestic work

than men. Work schedule unpredictability is especially detrimental for women reflecting the impact of sudden shift changes on household management and the organisation of childcare. Lowson and Arber's (2014) research on shift work by female nurses within dual-career families, found that gendered expectations around domestic labour shaped the experience of nightwork. The management of nightwork and the 'maintenance of the rhythms of family life' extends beyond the night shift itself into 'preparatory' and 'recovery' stages. Women take on additional domestic and emotional labour before a period of nightwork commences and after it has finished, including sacrificing daytime sleep to be available to their children during the day. For these women paid work and unpaid domestic labour are mutually constituting.

Research on the impact of shiftwork on families and children, while limited, demonstrates a negative impact on children's emotional and developmental outcomes for those whose parents work shifts, with larger effects for single parent households and families on low incomes. There are key mediators of this relationship including parental depressive symptoms, quality of parenting, parent child interaction and unsupportive home environments. The relationship between shift work and outcomes for children was strongest for night-working mothers with pre-school and middle school children (Arlinghaus et al., 2019).

Extant literature confirms the impact of nightwork on two simultaneous and interacting aspects of social reproduction - the impact on workers bodies and the impact on their social relations - coincident with an increase in parents working unsocial hours.

Nightwork and childcare in the UK

The high proportion of parents working unsocial hours was identified by Perrons (2000) in the late 1990s, with women with low earning partners entering the labour market in the context of falling male wages. At that time partnered women were 50 per cent more likely to work in the evenings than those without children and in one in four partnered households one parent regularly worked in the evenings. At the time of this research UK government policy provided support for childcare for working parents with pre-school children; children aged 9 months to 4 years old got 15 hours of free childcare per week for 38 weeks of the year. However, government figures show that parents of children aged 0 to 4 years were more likely (64%) to report having reliable childcare compared to parents of older children aged 5-14 years (32%). In 2024, 31% of parents were finding it difficult or very difficult to meet their childcare costs for 0-4-year-olds, the figure was 19% for those with 5-14-year-olds (Department for Education, 2025).

The same government figures report that in 2010-11, 25% of all mothers were working full-time, but by 2022 this had increased to 41%. Along with the increase in the proportion of women working nights, evidence suggests there have been increases in shift working by women. In 2017, 20% of males and 17% of females in employment worked shifts (ONS, 2018). There are proportionately more people from Black and Minority Ethnic backgrounds working at night compared to the overall UK workforce (Norman, 2011), while between 2012 and 2022, the number of night-time workers born outside of the UK rose by 33 per cent to two million (ONS,2022).

While UK government policies aim to get mothers into the labour market, state-provided childcare has significantly declined and over 70% of services are now delivered for profit by private providers backed by investment companies – including private equity firms, asset managers and international pension funds. For Federici this is the marketisation of reproductive activities that the neoliberal turn has produced (2019). The free hours supported by government are underfunded and require additional top-up fees from parents, access to childcare has reduced and cannot meet demand (Jitendra, 2024). The interviews showed that respondents worked nights to fit around school hours,

but limited access to affordable services created tensions between women's increased labour market activity and childcare.

Nightwork and Social Reproduction

Despite Marx's empirical exposition in Capital Volume One, nightwork is a relatively unexplored topic in the history of labour (Duijzings and Dušková, 2022). Exceptionally, Apostolidis' (2025) textual reading of Marx's chapter on the working day in Capital Volume One explores night-time work from a qualitative perspective. While Marx analyses the extraction of absolute surplus value through the lengthening of the working day, Apostolidis emphasises how Capital documents the experiences of nineteenth century night workers and points to the 'petrification of working-class reproduction':

'Night comes to represent the contracted time, condensed space, petrified relational bonds and thwarted desires for human reproduction in a free, fulsome sense that includes reinvigorating oneself, caring for others and enjoying experiences apart from work or care.'
(Apostolidis, 2025:1)

The focus is on the negative effects of long hours and nightwork on workers' physical needs for rest, sleep and food, as well as on social bonds and socio-cultural needs, which together constitute social reproduction. Apostolidis identifies how nightwork homogenises workers' time and space across quantitative time, obliterating the qualitative nature of time for life as a social being, which capital infiltrates. It does so by blurring the boundaries between work and life, where 'life away from work' becomes reduced to bodily recovery and preparation for work.

Scholars have critically interrogated how ideas about the human body and of corporeality are fundamental to Marx's political economy. Fracchia (2008) argues that Marx's in-depth and extensive discussion of the immiseration of 19th century workers in industrial capitalism is more than merely describing exploitative working conditions. Rather, it is integral in explicating his theoretical analysis of the labour theory of value as it is embodied in capitalist relations of production, 'the meaning of capitalist relations of production is inscribed on the bodies of those whose labour produces unprecedented social wealth' (Fracchia, 2008:41). For Marx there is both the transhistorical natural body with biological and psychological processes and irreducible needs, and the social body. The labouring body constituted as the physical body is shaped by the historically specific social, technological and economic forms through which material life is produced, while the body in turn shapes technology and social life (Rioux, 2014).

Industrial production would operate without limits if it 'did it not meet with certain natural obstructions in the weak bodies and the strong wills of its human attendants' (Marx, 1995:405), that is, workers' capacity for collective resistance to the exploitation of their vulnerable bodies with their physiological limits. These dynamics are demonstrated in union struggles that established the eight-hour working day, with eight hours of consolidated sleep as the 'normal' requirement and eight hours for recreation. In nightwork the needs of capitalist production for infinitely flexible bodies comes up against basic physiological limits concerning the necessity for sleep, with circadian rhythms aligned with solar time, rather than with the standardised and universalised clock time of capitalism. Bodies are individually variable but have limits in their capacity to re-align to changes in circadian rhythm associated with nightwork, as well as their tolerance for the associated sleep deprivation, while adaption to nightwork is compromised for aging bodies (Moreno et.al 2019). Occupational health guidelines utilise scientific discourses that mediate both the social construction of working time and the rhythms of nightwork and its effects on physiological processes to fit 'average' bodies into the demands for capitalist production.

The significance of the body, and specifically the relationship between the 'natural' body and the labouring body, has become a focus of attention within an SRT framework (Rioux, 2015). Nightwork disrupts workers' capacities for social reproduction both in relation to its direct effects on the

restoration of the worker's body (in the short-term sleep-deprivation and fatigue and in the long-term risk of illness), as well as through its impacts on social reproduction in relation to family and social life.

What has been termed the Marxian school of social reproduction (Ferguson, 2020) focussed on the incorporation of domestic labour into Marx's value theory and how unpaid labour in the form of housework is essential to capital accumulation (Csányi, 2023) – the root of calls for the remuneration of unpaid work or housework (Federici, 2020). This debate, however, assumes a strict gender division of domestic labour, heuristically separating the locations where value is produced and extracted (the household vs the workplace), but often privileging the 'private' reproductive sphere. Such analysis can underplay women's waged labour and workplace struggle, which are central to this paper.

In contrast, Vogel (1983) argues that formal production and social reproduction, rather than being separate spheres, are mutually constituting, so that the spaces of social reproduction are shaped by, and in turn shape, relations of production. Critically, Vogel (1983) identifies a fundamental contradiction within capitalism which requires labour power for production to occur, but in order to maximise surplus value, also needs to keep the wages upon which the social reproduction of labour power depends, as low as possible; 'from the point of view of capital, the social reproduction of the workforce is simultaneously indispensable and an obstacle to accumulation' (Vogel 2013: 156). This central contradiction destabilises the conditions required for social reproduction. Hence social reproduction is a site of contestation, struggle and resistance, and of crisis (Fraser, 2017) since 'there can be no labour without life' (Bhattacharya et al., 2021:20). The focus is on how the testimonies of UK night workers demonstrate that productive and reproductive spheres are interwoven and mutually constituted and reconfigured within particular formations of capitalism.

Vogel (1983) broadened social reproduction to include not only the unpaid domestic work of women but also their low paid work as (for example) carers and cleaners, as well as the social institutions that provide and regulate education, social welfare and health. Here, social reproduction is susceptible to subsumption and commodification contributing directly to surplus value creation (e.g. the privatisation of healthcare, social care, education). Bakker and Gill (2019) position social reproduction as central to understanding the political economy of globalisation, reflecting that regimes of social reproduction vary across time and space. Fraser (2017) identifies how historically specific forms of capitalism reflect a distinctive organisation of social reproduction, gender and family ideals, including the commodification of care work and the extent to which it is supported through state or corporate provision or located in households, neighbourhoods or civil society. The contradictions between capitalist production and social reproduction contribute to the periodic crises of capitalism. Following World War II, the state assumed some responsibility for social reproduction in the form of social welfare, including childcare, albeit dependent on 'a family wage' and this regime mitigated capitalism's contradictions for several decades. Fraser argues that the shift from welfare state capitalism to neoliberalism and the rise of financial capitalism in post-industrial economies has led to downward pressure on the wages of workers, longer working hours, the erosion of working conditions and the decreasing power of unions. The number of women entering into the paid workforce has increased at the same time as state provision of social welfare has reduced, pushing unpaid domestic labour back onto workers who are generally unable to afford the costs of commodified forms of social reproduction (childcare and domestic work). Downward pressure on wages can be offset by a shift to domestic labour even below the 'reproduction level', and reproductive labour acts as a buffer for economic fluctuations by allowing wages to go even below the minimum needed for survival, so accommodating economic and social crises (Csányi, 2023). Patterns of value extraction in the wider financial realm impact upon the nature and form of management strategies, work organisation and the exploitation of labour markets (Hauptmeier and Vidal, 2014).

Fraser identifies a 'dualised organisation of social reproduction, commodified for those who can pay for it, privatised for those that cannot – and glossed over by the ideal of the 'two-earner family' (2017:25). The externalisation of care work onto families and communities has occurred at a moment when their capacity to perform it is diminished. This model has produced what Fraser calls a 'crisis in care' which is underpinned by the contradiction between capitalist exploitation and need for, yet disavowal of, social reproduction leading to struggles over 'work-life balance', the length of the working week, the provision of childcare, housing, etc. While historically feminism has been concerned with women's exploitation in relation to paid and unpaid care work, the contradictions between production and social reproduction shape and re-shape gender relationships between men and women; in two-earner households' men are also drawn into struggles over social reproduction. It is these fundamental contradictions that are articulated in the testimonies of night workers presented below.

Methods

Apostolidis foregrounds Marx's desire, in *Capital*, to 'document the metastasis of workers' labour hours, physical health problems and social degeneracies with scrupulous exactitude and to illuminate social experiences and political possibilities' (2025:2). The intention here is to replicate worker-centred empirical research similarly grounding theory in contemporary social experience. This paper is based upon research on nightwork commissioned by four trade unions, largely in the rail (Network Rail, train operating companies and London Underground) and postal sectors, plus others working in warehouses, factories and the prison service. National officers identified respondents they felt could provide relevant experiences of nightwork and who were prepared to be interviewed. Semi-structured interviews explored workers' experience of nightwork and its impact on their lives, the factors shaping their decision-making about nightwork, how both organisational and labour market factors and changes shape nightwork and the measures that employers and unions take to mitigate risk. Regimes of nightwork referred to: shift patterns, the length of night shifts, the number of days in a run of night shifts, the frequency of runs of nightshifts across the year and the number days for recovery. Participants were recruited through four trade unions: the Communication Workers' Union (CWU), National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers (RMT), the Transport Salaried Staffs' Association (TSSA) and Community, a union representing workers across a range of sectors. The research is based on interviews with a national officer from each union and 47 union members.

Interviews with workers were conducted online and recorded by the researchers, with written informed consent. All personal information was anonymised prior to publication. Transcripts were subject to thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2021) using both inductive and deductive coding with the support of NVivo software to reduce the data by categorising common themes across the interviews enabling patterns of meaning to be identified. One objective was to record the work environments of the respondents and their concentration in rail and postal services captured specific organisational contexts that could have lent itself to a case study approach, although the remaining respondents were from a range of sectors. However, across the sample it was the commonalities identified across jobs and industries that were of most interest, in terms of the intensification of work as a result of deregulation, privatisation, marketisation and restructuring as characteristic of financialised capitalism (Bartlett and Varus, 2017).

Table 1 shows the participants' characteristics in terms of occupations and demographics: just over one third (36%) were female and just over 10% were from black and minority ethnic (BME) backgrounds. Over half (57%) were over 50 years of age and approaching half (48%) had been working nights for over 20 years. Just under half (47%) worked rotating shifts, including nights, a slightly lower proportion (42%) permanent nights and the remainder some other form of nightwork. Regarding participants' personal circumstances: 19% were not in a current relationship with many having experienced relationship breakdown. Approaching half (43%) had children, and although

some were now adult, the respondents reflected on child rearing while they were dependent. Others were grandparents contributing to childcare, or younger workers considering having children. The sample broadly comprised a combination of older workers doing night shifts over a long period who described changes to work and night shift regimes and the toll on their aging bodies, and reflected upon nightwork and childcare during their reproductive years; and younger workers most of whom organised night shifts around childcare, and who commented on the impact of nightwork on social relationships and on their bodies. The analysis indicated social reproduction as an overarching conceptual frame in which to understand the common experiences of nightwork across these industries, reflecting the two inter-related elements - the replenishment of labour power and care for non-workers outside paid work - that the paper seeks to explicate.

Table 1 here

Findings

The context of nightwork- financialisation and privatisation

In the UK, the financialisation of the economy involved the deregulation and privatisation of public assets, with shareholder profits becoming a primary business rationale. The majority of the participants in this study worked in the UK rail and postal sectors, but also prisons, that had been subject to liberalisation and privatisation, prisons from 1992, the railways in 1997 and Royal Mail from 2008. The privatisation of train operators has driven repeated cycles of reorganisation intensifying regimes of nightwork which exacerbated negative impacts on workers. Respondents reported increases in psychosocial risks in the work environment related to restructures. Staff shortages led to excessive work demands, including pressures on workers to do increased overtime to cover for vacancies or colleagues' absence. Nevertheless, there were reports in one operating company of a successful trade union campaign to increase the workforce, reducing the need for overtime on night shifts and mitigating work-life conflict. However, older workers contrasted their increasingly poor working conditions under privatisation with those when the railways were in public ownership and when overtime and nightwork were more limited and when they anticipated having the bodily capacity to continue to work until retirement, which the vast majority did not consider to be possible under current nightwork regimes.

Network Rail, which is responsible for rail infrastructure, was taken back out of the private sector in 2014 to become a public corporation, however, it has driven through a series of restructures aimed at increasing efficiency and driving down costs. It has significantly increased the amount of nightwork required of workers on new contracts and for those applying for promotion, with many reporting intensified nightwork regimes that seemingly violate health and safety guidelines. Increased amounts of night and weekend work and on-call working made it much more difficult for individual workers to have flexibility in rosters to balance work with family and social commitments. Further, workers reported that managers were frequently intransigent in reducing nightwork when recommended by occupational health assessments, rather prioritising 'business needs.'

Following the privatisation of Royal Mail financial losses have led to changes to working practices and employee terms and conditions with the closure of mail centres and reductions in jobs, including through automation. There had been changes to allowances for those on newer contracts, including reductions in night-shift premia. The Royal Mail is pursuing a 24/7 mail network that would incorporate Sunday deliveries and a review of duty patterns, moving from a standard working week of six days. The increase in online shopping has meant a shift from letters to parcels, which are

heavier and change the nature of work. Similarly, the increase in next-day home delivery in the private sector was evidenced by respondents engaged in intensive warehouse work.

Respondents in Royal Mail also noted the impact that the removal of internal flights for moving mail between UK airports, apparently for environmental reasons, has had upon its drivers. It necessitates longer and more frequent driving routes throughout the night to fulfil next day deliveries. The closure of air hubs and delivery offices has led to redeployment and longer commuting times for workers that means night workers can no longer avoid early morning traffic when returning home.

While London Underground remains a public service Transport for London has become financialised through participation in borrowing and debt markets, raising revenue from commercial property, and through public private partnerships which then drive efforts for operational efficiency. Following modernisation programmes respondents reported reduced staffing and increased workloads, a move to a call centre type environment with increased monitoring by managers, workflow KPIs, less autonomy and more limited relationships with contractors and customers. Customer service managers increasingly worked on stations alone at night, dealing with workplace violence and abuse, intervening in potential suicides and attending to medical emergencies.

At the time of this research, workers were enduring a cost-of-living crisis alongside the high cost of privatised childcare. Overall, the impact of financialised capitalism on work environment provided a context for nightwork that further compressed workers' capacity for social reproduction.

Nightwork and social reproduction

The research interrogated workers' preferences for nightwork, finding that a small number of respondents preferred nightwork as they are 'night owls' and that it fitted around the rest of their lives. Preferences for nightwork can also reflect the state of the labour market and poor previous experiences in alternative day jobs, in one case unpredictable and long working hours in homecare that extended into the night. In some occupations nights can be seen as less stressful and (in the absence of senior managers) provide workers with more autonomy over their work. However, in this sample night shifts were generally worked for financial reasons, with workers reliant on premia in a period in which the value of wages has declined. Moreover, a key driver and recurrent theme across the narratives was that night shifts enabled childcare or eldercare and this group included grandparents who provided support with grandchildren.

The findings evidence the interaction of nightwork with two elements of social reproduction, firstly the reproduction of labour power in terms of the regeneration of the working body and secondly the reproduction of the labour force in terms of domestic and household labour including child rearing.

The reproduction of labour power – bodily regeneration and replenishment

In Capital Volume One Marx conceives the impact of nightwork on social reproduction emphasising how nightwork appropriates time for other activity; 'It reduces the sound sleep needed for the restoration, reparation, refreshment of the bodily powers to just so many hours of torpor as the revival of an organism, absolutely exhausted, renders essential' (1867/1977:375). While Marx was explicitly drawing upon observations of the exploitation of workers during industrialisation, the tension between labour and the need for bodily replenishment that underpins the relationship of capitalism to social reproduction is apparent in the experiences of the workers in this research.

Circadian rhythm, sleep deprivation, and fatigue

Workers, including those who positively chose nightwork, overwhelmingly reported that night shifts resulted in fragmented and split sleep patterns of poor quality, and difficulties in re-adjusting to normal sleep patterns when not working nights. This resulted in cumulative sleep deprivation and fatigue related

to circadian rhythm disturbances. They described feeling 'shattered' and 'like zombies' while doing night shifts. When interviewed, Alex was two days into a run of seven nights finishing on a Monday morning and then starting again on Tuesday at 5pm:

'So I've already done two nights and I'm already ... I'm ragged, I'm already ragged. I've only done two, I've still got another five to go. It's pretty brutal - the impact is devastating' (Alex, Service Controller, London Underground).

Workers reported having insufficient time for recovery and problems re-adjusting to changing shift patterns. Crucially, recovery time eats into workers' days off and annual leave with workers reporting being completely 'wiped out' for at least two days after a run on night shifts. This is not a burden experienced to the same extent by day shift workers (where circadian rhythms are not disrupted), yet recovery time from night shifts is not paid for by organisations rather it forms part of workers' 'free time' and represents a further incursion into time for social reproduction.

For Apostolidis (2025) nightwork undermines working class reproduction by producing human bodies increasingly incapable of physically functioning at work. The older workers in this sample clearly stated that nightwork becomes more debilitating and difficult to tolerate beyond the age of 50 and were worried about how they could continue to work to retirement. Many reported physical health problems including cardiovascular disease and high blood pressure, obesity, diabetes, as well as symptoms related to work stress, and mental health issues. They were conscious that as they aged their bodies were no longer resilient, as Lloyd who was in his 50s explained:

'I reckon around about 48, 49, I'm just thinking, it's starting to wear me down a bit. Like I say, I've done 36 years of shifts. I've always worked as a shift worker. I've always done nights and days and I think I'm at the stage now where I'm thinking it's starting to affect me health-wise as well I suppose because obviously I think my health has started to deteriorate a little bit from it because my body isn't getting its rest periods' (Lloyd, Infrastructure Controller, Rail).

In the Royal Mail, a younger worker, Matt, described the collective impact of nightwork, including on mental health:

'Emotionally and physically, you're all kind of on a precipice most of the shift, because you're in this constant state, a lot of decisions and things that go on in here, if it happens on other shifts it doesn't seem as detrimental because you're more likely feeling quite refreshed, but like I say, we collectively just seem to be running on fumes. A lot of the time, even if people don't realise it, we all have these dips... ...It's not supposed to be that good for your mental health really, is it not? No, it hasn't been, it hasn't been the easiest and obviously it does somewhat affect your health over a period of time. You always hear people say, like, "you can't work nights forever" and how much it takes off your life'. (Matt, Mail Screener, Royal Mail).

While some workers were generally aware of the impact of working nights on health and mortality, others distanced themselves from prevailing knowledge and a number reported that colleagues could be reluctant to reveal health conditions that might entail their removal from nightwork and premia.

Regimes of diet and exercise

Marx commented on the impact of nightwork on mealtimes describing it as ‘incorporated where possible into the process of production itself, so that food is given to the labourer as to a mere means of production, as coal is supplied to the boiler, grease and oil to the machinery’ (1867/1977: 375). Many workers had limited access to food at night with the only food supplied by employers being automatic dispensing machines with chocolate bars and crisps. In the Royal Mail staff canteens had been closed or were not open at night. Respondents may be too busy to be able to take breaks, particularly if they were lone workers with no relief staff. Some were directed by managers when to take a meal break that might not align with when they were hungry or when they needed to eat to be able to stay awake. Most ended up eating ‘rubbish’ food when on nightshifts. Respondents reported ongoing and repeated efforts to maintain better diets and to exercise, but fatigue and social desynchronisation made this difficult.

Several respondents contested managerial discourses that placed responsibility onto workers for improving their eating patterns and exercise regimes because these exhortations failed to acknowledge the effort needed to organise and prepare food when exhausted from nightwork regimes. Managerial advice did not recognise how eating patterns are shaped by the contingencies of nightwork, and the reality that fatigued bodies often craved fast, high energy food to get through the night and to cope with the physical demands of the job, as for Grant, in rail maintenance:

‘But in terms of eating generally, I’d say shift work is catastrophic. A lot of us get thoroughly sick of being told that you’ve got to eat salads and you’ve got to eat this and you’ve got to eat healthily, but the realistic thing is, if you’ll excuse the language, you eat shit. Because you come in on night shift, and you’re looking at the factor that it’s a massive physical effort coming between 12pm and 5 in the morning. So, you come into the depot, and you’re pouring coffee and cookies down your neck, because you’re trying to get some sort of energy into your system. So, yeah, you’d eat massively unhealthy stuff, and you just see that pattern reflected, everyone else does the same. I don’t think I know anyone who ate particularly healthily’ (Grant, Team Leader signalling maintenance, Rail).

Night shift working also affected workers diet at home. All the workers reported that fatigue following night shifts is a significant factor in poor diets, since they are often too tired to organise food and to prepare healthy meals. Steve, a Royal Mail driver, conceded that nightwork could also affect appetite following night shifts ‘You eat at silly times then when you are off, you get hungry at 2am.’ A few workers conceded that they used alcohol to self-medicate for sleeping problems, or as a response to increased work stress, confirming academic studies (Richter et al., 2021).

The academic literature identifies a relationship between reduced physical activity and shift work, linking desynchronisation with the availability of leisure facilities and team-mates, conflict with other responsibilities (domestic and family) and fatigue (Atkinson et al., 2008; Arlinghaus et al., 2019). While some made efforts to take regular exercise, others had little energy, as Phillip describes:

‘I love going to the gym and I love training, but the night shifts just make it hard. You wake up and you think, I’m going to work in a few hours, so, you just don’t go.’ (Phillip, Team Leader, Signalling & Communication, Rail).

Worker’s bodies become contested sites caught, on the one hand, between managerial and scientific discourses about the responsibility of workers to discipline their own bodies and to flexibly adapt

their body's circadian rhythm to the needs of night-working and, on the other hand, the negative impacts of nightwork regimes on workers' bodies that undermines their capacity to do so. Capital depends upon the supply of healthy, energetic bodies to safely and effectively labour, but nightwork undermined workers' daily bodily capacity for regeneration and social reproduction, while passing responsibility for maintaining healthy bodies onto workers themselves. These dynamics indicate the resistance of the body and limits to workers' adaptation to discourses and practices associated with intensified regimes of nightwork that demand infinitely adaptable bodies. These conflicts are embedded in workers' critiques of managerial demands that shift responsibility for fatigue management and health onto workers. Further, the fatigue related to circadian rhythm disturbance and sleep deprivation combined with social desynchronisation had negative impacts on the social reproduction of families and social life.

Social reproduction – children, families and social life

Respondents with children and those who had previously raised children, reported that working nights fitted with childcare. While women might take primary responsibility, nightwork drew men into regimes of childcare by enabling two-earner households to juggle childcare between them. Some women did part-time nightwork so that they could fit in with their partner's work patterns and manage childcare. For two female participants with London Underground the only option for part-time work was to do permanent 12-hour night shifts on Fridays and Saturdays. Another female maintenance worker on London Underground was full-time on permanent 12-hour nightshifts, starting at 11pm Mondays and finishing at 6.30am Saturdays, enabling her to combine work with childcare during the day and have some time on weekends to spend with her family. For female and male respondents, night shifts allowed them to take children to school after their shifts, returning home to sleep a few hours before picking them up in the afternoon. Juggling childcare and sleep was seen as a key benefit of doing nightwork. Julie, a warehouse worker, takes her granddaughter to school to support her single parent daughter in paid work:

'So, it's easier, so that when I finish, I more or less go straight from here and take my granddaughter to school, and then do whatever I've got to do and then go to bed. A lot of ladies do it for that reason, so when they finish, they can go home, the partners are looking after the children - well, obviously they're all in bed - and then they can take the child to school. Then they sleep while the child's at school and then get up, and then pick them up and then what happens is after tea the partner comes home or whoever comes home and takes over.' (Julie, Stock Controller, warehouse).

Julie reported that there are single parents or workers with younger children who do part-time hours or two full shifts, normally a Sunday and Monday, 10.5 hours between 8.30 pm and 7am, which she described as 'hard.'

Another single parent, Jessica, worked in the prison system, and took a demotion, moving to nights to manage work and childcare. She did permanent nights in prisons one week on and one week off, paid at a flat rate with no premia. She was divorced and her 12-year-old son lived with her ex-husband on the weeks that she worked. However, to manage the school runs between them, she picked her son up on her way home from work, took him home and got him ready for school, and then took him to school. She had initially trained as a Prison Custody Officer (PCO), but because the day shift started at 6.45am she could not take her son to school. She moved into the lower paid Organisational Support Officer role to do so, involving permanent nights:

'I did do the PCO training and I did go on days for a short while, but with things to do with my childcare and my personal life, I opted to stand down and I dropped my badge and I went back to nights because it works better for me personally with my son and my life and everything. So I go straight after work, pick him up, make sure he's suited and booted, get all

his kit, drop him at school, then I come home and come to bed, and that's me done. (Jessica, Organisational Support Officer, Prison Service).

In the Royal Mail, Tania had found that three nights from 8:15pm to 6.15am Friday and Monday and 6pm to 4am on Sunday suited her as she could fit it in around childcare, but she resisted a change that would have meant she had to move to five nights from 10pm to 6am:

'When I used to do my three nights, it suited my family life. My son was a lot younger so I never had to have [paid] childcare or anything like that. But thankfully, these new hours didn't happen, because I'd have left. So yeah, the fifth night ruins you, you're tired, it's too much for family life.' (Tania, Operational Support Grade, Royal Mail).

The timing and frequency of shifts is critical for workers to be able to manage work and childcare, to the extent that it can determine what roles they are willing to undertake and whether they can stay in the job. For two working parents it was the capacity to synchronise shifts that enabled them to cover childcare. Like others, Sam, a manager with a rail company, described a highly disciplined childcare regime with his wife who also worked shifts work in a hospital, requiring them to exchange their young child between them in car parks on the way home or to work.

The key driver for those preferring nightwork was to juggle work and childcare and so avoid having to pay childcare costs. The flexibility of rosters was a key issue for many workers with children or those considering having children, given the high costs of childcare in the UK. For example, in the Royal Mail, Rich and Alice were in a relationship, and both worked nights on the same shift. They were concerned about how they might fit having children around their work, anticipating that they would not be able to afford childcare, and worried whether one of them would be able to swap shifts:

'We're wondering how easy it is going to be to change our shifts or for one of us to change shift because, we haven't got any kids though, you know, we might think soon that maybe if we want to start having kids and stuff, we can't both be working the night shift now or paying for childcare on our wages. You're not going to be able to afford full-time care and I can't rely on our parents 24/7 and all that. So, we wondered how easy it's going to be for one of us to change shift and how accommodating ... we don't know how easy things are going to be.' (Rich, Operational Support Grade, Royal Mail).

Night shifts were shaped by employer rather than workers needs for flexibility, with most workers reporting that it was difficult to change shifts to accommodate changing needs related to childcare, domestic emergencies, medical appointments or family occasions. Management was inflexible regarding roster and shift changes, with inflexibility exacerbated by a wider absence of both family-friendly work policies and affordable childcare. This placed significant pressures on parents trying to combine paid and unpaid labour.

Nightwork instigated a complex relationship between work and social reproduction for workers. In the absence of public provision of accessible and affordable childcare the careful timing of night shifts facilitated juggling childcare between parents (or others offering support) while limiting the amount and quality of time of time that they could spend with their children and partners (discussed below). Following Fraser (2017), the costs of social reproduction in relation to childcare are displaced from the state and employer onto individual workers. These costs then shaped these workers preferences for nightwork which in turn imposed stringent work/life regimes juggling work, the need for sleep, and childcare. Carefully co-ordinated work/family regimes are easily disrupted by managerial changes to rosters or hours of work, and when combined with limited working time flexibility for workers, indicate the instability social reproduction.

Nightwork and the quality of relationships

Apostolidis (2025) emphasises that Marx understood social reproduction in terms not just of the hours away from work but, most importantly, the quality of time and space of social reproduction as 'the production of life itself'. While nightwork facilitated unpaid childcare through stringent coordination, it also limited both the quantity and quality of the time that night working parents have with their children and family. Night shifts can also place additional responsibility for childcare and domestic labour onto non-shift working partners, often women, and amongst both male and female night workers there were tensions around parenting and work. Many of the respondents reported the negative impacts of nightwork on children and relationships, desynchronising shift workers' social lives from that of their family and social networks. Fatigue negatively affected workers' mood and mental health and hence the quality of their engagement in social relationships. Participants described the negative effect on their partners of them being unavailable - not just physically but also emotionally. They concurred that nightwork was a significant contributor to relationship break-down, either their own or for colleagues. A number of those working in mail sorting offices were divorced and single and it was suggested that those on nights find it harder to find partners because of fatigue and social desynchronisation so may come to depend on social relationships at work.

Rohan reported that doing night shifts had destroyed his marriage, commenting 'It's our fault for getting used to the money.' As a night shift manager in the Royal Mail, he earned an extra £100 per week, but ironically after his relationship breakdown he subsequently became dependent upon this to pay his child support. To avoid childcare costs, Gemma worked nights in Royal Mail while her husband was on the late shift. She described their relationship as 'passing ships' including having to have separate holidays with their children. Maureen in Customer Services for London Underground felt guilty, remorseful, and conflicted about work because of the impacts on her relationships with her children, especially when older children articulated their own frustrations about their parent's nightwork:

'My eldest, she's noticing. Like I said, she's eight. The oldest three, they get upset when I say that I've got work. But my eldest one, she's like, "but why have you got to go? Why can't you just ask if you can have this weekend off or can we do this? Why is it you've got to go to work then? Can't we just go on holiday? Well, not holiday, but like a little weekend away or go stay with family for a night?" Things like that. She's got a lot of questions why I keep having to leave when she's home.... a big concern of mine is that I'll look back and regret it, because the kids are only kids for a certain amount of time. I don't want to look back and be like I wasted – not wasted, but I didn't get to enjoy all those weekends. Because I sat down one day and out of 52 weekends in a year, I get seven at home with my kids' (Maureen, Customer Service Assistant, London Underground).

Maureen was explicitly aware that the combination of her absence due to nightwork and her fatigue was having a negative effect on the quality of her relationships with her children, despite the convenience of nightwork fitting in with school runs.

It is not just workers' bodies which are disciplined by the regimes of nightwork; partners and children are also required to adopt the rhythms of the night worker, for instance needing to be quiet during the day, or partners taking children away from the house to enable daytime sleep. Male workers were aware of the negative impact of their poor moods on their parenting, with one rail worker regretting that he was 'an angry dad' when on nightshifts largely due to sleep deprivation and fatigue and being intolerant of noisy children. Phillip was conflicted between needing to provide financially for his family, but also to be present physically and emotionally for them:

'I could really feel it then, because I was too tired to fully be engaged and give my little boy the time that I really wanted to give. That has a knock-on effect with your mental health.

You're talking to yourself, thinking, am I doing the right here? You're thinking about the money, you're trying to be a parent. On both levels you're trying to provide, and you're also trying to be there emotionally and physically and everything else. It is really hard with shift work to be able to do that. Your circadian rhythm and your body clock is completely off. I remember sitting there at times and it does get to you where you think, I'm not doing a good enough job' (Phillip, Team Leader in Signals & Communication).

Other workers reported the conflict between doing nightwork and working extra overtime to provide for their families financially, and their capacity to commit quality time to their relationships and children. This was particularly the case for male workers, reflecting a tension between financial and emotional contributions to social reproduction, possibly in the context of a shift from the male breadwinner model.

The difficulties with not being emotionally and physically available is perhaps heightened for female shift workers, given residual social norms about women and motherhood, and can leave some feeling disconnected from their families when children's primary relationships become more developed with the non-shift-working parent, as Sophie described:

'It's like the family is getting on without me. That's the reality dawning on me more. ... However, I still try to wriggle myself into whatever is happening at home, but I find that there is a connection there with the girls and their dad. It's like, there's a relationship that I'm kind of outside the circle of because I'm not there most of the time. What I do, I make my connection mainly by phone. I'm not going to be there until they go to bed, and he is there with them ... Oh dear, it's hard' (Sophie, Customer Service Manager, London Underground).

Respondents discussed the impact that night shift work had on their wider social life; for Rohan *'There is just no time to socialise because you're asleep or you're getting prepared to come back to work. Yeah, it's been constantly catching up on sleep.'* Similarly for Cheryl:

'You just strike that week [of night shifts] out, you are not going to be socialising, you are not catching up with family or friends. ... the more consecutive nights in a row, the less you sleep. But you have this permanent sense of grogginess. You're not as sharp and you're not able to go about your social life, or to be there for your friends or your family, really' (Cheryl, Customer Service Manager, London Underground).

One older worker with decades working for the railways reported that he coped by treating night shifts as only 'work and sleep' and did not try to arrange anything else, so he 'writes off the week'. Those doing 12-hour shifts concurred there was no time except for 'work/sleep/work.' This perspective reflects Apostolidis' notion of the homogenisation of workers' time and space.

The contradictions and conflicts for night workers between financially providing for families, juggling work, school runs and sleep and trying to engage in fulfilling emotional and physical relationships, embody the contradictions within capital itself, which both requires and repudiates social reproduction (Vogel, 1983). Workers needed wages to support their families but nightwork further infiltrated key aspects of their lives away from work, undermining their capacity to enjoy life and fulfilling relationships. These effects on relationships are mediated by the body since it is the excessive fatigue of nightwork due to circadian rhythm misalignment and sleep deprivation that negatively affects workers emotional availability in relationships with children and their partners and the quality of the time they have together, while social asynchronicity limits the quantity of available time. These conflicts are intensified, as Fraser (2017) argues, in financial capitalism with the withdrawal of the state as a vehicle for social reproduction and the shifting of the demands related to social reproduction onto workers.

Conclusion

Nightwork has received only limited attention in research, despite the increased participation of women in nightwork over recent years and the documented negative impacts of nightwork on workers' bodies, health and family and social lives. In documenting contemporary nightwork this paper makes an empirical contribution to Fraser's conceptualisation of a 'crisis of social reproduction' that is rooted in workers' experience and invigorated through their testimony. For Fraser (2017) no society that systematically undermines social reproduction can endure for long, but financialised capitalism is doing just that. Financialisation defines the recent history of the industries in which these workers were located, intensifying the conditions of work and nightwork while withdrawing public provision of accessible and affordable childcare.

The testimonies of night workers evidence 'the destruction of workers' reproductive resources, capacities and relationships' (Apostoidis, 2025:1). Workers, both young and old, identified circadian rhythm asynchronicity, disturbed and insufficient sleep leading to excessive fatigue both at work and outside work. The conditions of nightwork preclude adequate recovery time and the replenishment of working bodies and social relationships. Older workers, across occupations, described the negative impact of nightwork on long term physical and mental health and on the limits of their capacity for nightwork beyond 50 years of age. This resonates with Marx's assertion that 'capital cares nothing for the length of life of labour-power' (1977).

While older workers in the sample testified to the toll of nightwork on their working bodies, working parents reflected on the tensions between labour market participation and childcare. The research indicates the convergence of male and female labour market activity with working parents taking up nightwork in order to avoid the costs of childcare. The government actively encourages women with children to enter the labour market and has conceded some state subsidisation of childcare for pre-school aged children. However, the state and employers have retreated from responsibility to provide collective or socialised childcare solutions and actively moved to a model of underfunded, marketised and financialised care that the workers in this research either could not access or afford. Those with childcare responsibilities are drawn to nightwork in the context in which capitalism's impulse to lower the cost of the reproduction of labour means those who cannot afford to pay for childcare have to absorb these costs at an individual level by working unsocial hours where they then struggle to combine productive and domestic labour within the 24-hour day. While for working parents nightwork enables a fragile synchronisation of childcare regimes with paid work, it simultaneously undermines the quality of time with children and partners. Nightwork is both enabling of, and undermining of, childcare. Males are drawn into this particular organisation of work and care with indications of some re-configuration of gender roles. Both men and women anguish over their adequacy in providing quantity and quality of care to their children.

The literature shows that the negative impacts of social desynchronisation inherent in nightwork can be ameliorated to a degree in the workplace when workers have genuine control of their shift schedules and are able to adjust their working hours to the demands of family and social relationships. However, respondents generally found management unreceptive to such requests, including to drop the number of night shifts worked. Respondents reported both employer reluctance to provide flexibility for those with children and a lack of family friendly policies that support working parents, signifying a retreat from organisational responsibility to provide jobs that facilitate work-life balance or reasonable adjustment.

The literature confirms socio-reproductive spaces as a continued arena for conflict (Arruzza et al., 2019). In this research there was some evidence of unions attempting to recoup work-life balance for their members. However, there are also tensions for unions where there may be differences between workgroups, while some want a better work-life balance with less demands, others may want to maintain the current levels of overtime and thus pay. The research for the unions made a number of

recommendations for future collective bargaining, including a right to move from nightwork onto day work from the age of 50, or before in the case of poor health, reviewing specific regimes of nightwork including the number and timing of recovery days and the provision of dedicated paid recovery leave days or extra annual leave. Unions might also push for the value of nightwork premia to be reassessed to reflect its physical and mental toll and disruption to family and social life. At national level unions could consider demanding minimum mandatory premia for working nights.

However, any demand for further compensation for night working comes in a context in which the Taylor Review of Modern Working Practices (2017) conceded there is a 'culture of unpaid overtime' and retreat from acknowledgement of unsocial hours through premia, although there is evidence of the reduction of nightshift premia, particularly in the context of the fall in value of real wages. The Taylor Review prompted debate over the nature of worker preference for more flexible forms of working or 'atypical employment' and particularly the gendered construction of preference, resonant here with apparent parental enthusiasm for nightwork that may facilitate childcare (Moore et al., 2018). Gash (2008) observed the difficulties in distinguishing between 'real' and 'accommodated' preferences, the last denoting choice in the absence of alternatives, including access to affordable childcare that places limitations on working hours and on preferences for nightwork despite its detrimental effects on social reproduction. Across the sectors and occupations studied here it is clear that relations of social reproduction define choices about labour market participation in the absence of national policies or employer practices that support parental employment or provide workplace adjustments. Productive work, in turn, shapes social reproduction.

Fraser locates the crisis of reproduction historically with the two-earner family as a characteristic of financialised capitalism marked by the increase in women's labour market activity. The research presented here suggests caution about conceptual frameworks that privilege either the sphere of production or reproduction thus obscuring the dynamic relationship between them. Confining women and women's struggle to the reproductive sphere risks essentialism and can underplay women's waged labour and workplace struggle. Testimonies of night workers underline the interaction of productive and reproductive spheres and their mutual constitution - as Bhattacharaya puts it 'the time of reproduction must necessarily respond to the structuring impulses of the time of production' (2017:10).

The research demonstrates the relevance of Vogel's (1983) emphasis on the contradictions between capitalist production and social reproduction - capital needs fresh and energetic bodies to productively and safely labour yet simultaneously undermines the social reproduction needed to produce such bodies. Nightwork epitomises the tendency for capital to obliterate workers' needs in relation to social reproduction, blurring the boundaries between work and life, since life away from work is reduced to recovery and preparation for work, and limits the capacity for familial and wider social relationships. The interviews confirm the damaging impacts of the intensification of nightwork on bodies, families and social relationships, laying bare the contradiction between capitalist accumulation and social reproduction. This may intensify struggles that seek a rebalancing of production and social reproduction— in Fraser's words 'overcoming financialised capitalism's rapacious subjugation of reproduction to production ... without sacrificing either emancipation or social protection' (2017: 36).

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