

You don't know what nights are like?

Mitra Tabrizian

Interview fragments from night time workers – as edited by artist Mitra Tabrizian

If you come to do the night shift it feels like you go to the opposite side, everybody's going one side and you're on the other one. It's a different pace of life. Everything is quiet. Nobody stresses. But a 12 hour shift? That's a downer!

Laura, security

When we were fighting in the jungle we had to be alert at night. The officers would have to stay up. So I'm used to it. But still in the jungle, you might be able to sleep here and there before the dawn attack, in here, you can't.

Anu, security

Even on your day off, you still can't sleep. It's like your body is confused, your brain is not used to you sleeping. I'm hoping in four, five months, I'll be done. But I thought I'd be done a few months ago, and I'm still here!

Evans, hotel night receptionist

I'm a bit of an owl. I can do night shifts. And if you have children, it's like, the other half is on days and you're on nights, that's how it is. But the worst thing is not having weekends off, then you hardly see each other.

Lora, ambience inspector

People aren't on permanent nights they have to get back to days, and that's hard. Every time I do a night or a few nights, on the second day of trying to be 'normal' I feel very low. What are you doing? Where are we? Like jet lag. And I'd think, I'll just go and see the GP. And then I think, oh no you've just had a night shift. Oh yes, this is my depressed day and you'll get over it.

Nancy, midwife

I'm from Ghana, you can't just come here and not work. You struggle but you have to do what the company expects you to do. And it's not only one thing like sweeping and sweeping alone, you finish sweeping, there's another thing to do, you finish that one, there's another thing to do.

Because here, you never finish!

Kwame, cleaning operative

I have my family, but I can't say I have any friends left, because during the day, all I want to do is sleep. At times I stay in for weeks and don't go out. I can't remember when I last woke up and went to see a friend. Yeah, except for my family I hardly see anyone.

Jude, cleaning supervisor

We are not designed to sleep during the day and be active at night. I've been working six nights a week for fifteen years now. The worst part is I don't have much connection with my family any more, as I can't spend enough time with them.

Joe, cleaning manager

I have not done a day job for a long time, since I've been in this country. Yeah, I've not done a day job for a long time so I cannot picture how it will be, no idea. My neighbours, they won't see me, so maybe they're wondering; is he working or is he not working?

Kwaku, cleaning manager

I don't go for a break because if I sit down I feel too tired to go back. And if I do, there's nowhere to sit, no heating, no ventilation. It's the colour of our skin, that's what we think. That's why we are treated like this. And six nights a week is not easy. I have problems with my wife and children because I haven't got time for them. I wrote a letter to see if I could do five nights a week. They said, I signed a contract for six nights and they can do nothing!

Matthew, cleaning operative

Night shifts! I never request them. I actually hate them. They make me depressed. And now the Government is trying to cut the extra pay that we used to have. One night I was so tired and terrified that I might fall asleep on this shift that I had three Red Bulls and three coffees to stay awake. In the morning I started getting chest pain and I was like, oh my God, I'm actually going to die on a night shift.

Lolly, nurse

I hate nights. I think my body reacts negatively to nights, even after all these years. There's something terrible about nights, you just feel like eating crap all the time, crisps, chocolate, you name it. You need to have a sugar rush or salt rush. It's just because your body is asking what are you doing here, just go to bed, and you can't. But it's the day before that is daunting, then when I'm there, I'm there. I just do the job. The only good thing is, as a night editor, you're on your own and make your own decisions.

Nuno, night editor, television news

I don't like getting up to an alarm. I prefer nights to days. And I like my coffee. I've been doing nights for ten years. Yeah, straight from school into an apprenticeship, and then straight on to nights. It's been hard, but you get used to it. That's what I say to my missus - unless you've worked nights you don't know what nights are like? The scary thing is driving back home. Because some of it, it's just a blur. You get into your road, you think, how did I get here?

Craig, maintenance engineer

I can sleep standing. I can sleep on a chair. I've got no trouble sleeping. But I've got to sleep! I switch off when I'm at work which helps our situation, living in the Midlands and working in London. It works because when I'm back home, I'm days, when I'm working at nights then I don't have the battle with my family. But the downside is, I can only see them in my day off! If I had a choice, I'll always choose a day job. I enjoy the challenges and problem solving and mentoring my team. But my dream job is to be a game manager. In Africa, in the wild, doing safari trips. Certainly a lot different to what you get anywhere in England.

Kevin, cleaning manager

I can do nights. But the transition from night to day? That's hard! You work overtime on Saturday day and then have to do Sunday night. I sort of think what do I do on Sunday then? Can't do much, because I've got to go back to work in the eve. You cope, it's all you can do. With my boy, he always wants to play and doesn't realize that I'm getting ready for work, I'm a bit down and have to get my energy up. Yeah he misses out, he misses out a lot! But what can you do? You have to earn money... don't you.

Gary, maintenance engineer