Not a silent night in every workplace

For most people, the festive season is a time to relax and take a well-earned rest from work, but figures from the Office for National Statistics show that 863,000 workers in the UK, 2.9% of the total in employment, worked on Christmas Day 2012, the most recent for which numbers are available. This is slightly down on the 2008 figure of 887,000 people working, or 3.0% of the total.

Looking at the type of job that people do, the occupation with the highest number of workers working on Christmas Day was care workers (136,000 people), followed by nurses (77,000), nursing auxiliaries (43,000), chefs and cooks (33,000), security guards (31,000) and police officers (21,000). Senior and junior care workers, nurses and nursing auxiliaries combined made up almost a third (32%) of those working on Christmas Day.

The occupation with the highest proportion of its workforce working was not surprisingly clergy, of whom 49% per cent said they worked that day. Other groups with high proportions working included communication operators (28%), paramedics (25%), prison service officers (25%) and farm workers (20%).

ONS statistician Nick Palmer said:

“These figures from our Labour Force Survey give a fascinating picture of who works on Christmas Day. They show the huge contribution to our welfare made by groups such as health and emergency service workers – adding up the different groups, we see that 141,000 doctors, nursing staff and midwives were working on the festive day, as well as 39,000 in the police, fire and ambulance services. Other groups, however, were no doubt taking a well-earned break after a very busy run-up to Christmas – for example only 1% of sales and retail assistants and 1% of postal workers were in work that day.”

The proportion of workers who worked on Christmas Day 2012 varied somewhat across the country: the highest proportion was in the North East (3.6%), followed by Scotland (3.4%). The lowest proportion working that day was in London at 2.1%, followed by the West Midlands (2.2%).
Background notes

1. Every other year the Labour Force Survey includes a question asking respondents whether they worked on the previous Christmas Day. The question was last asked in mid-2013 with respect to Christmas Day 2012.

2. The occupational group ‘clergy’ includes clerics of non-Christian faiths.


4. Details of the policy governing the release of new data are available from the media office.

5. National Statistics are produced to high professional standards set out in the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. They undergo regular quality assurance reviews to ensure that they meet customer needs. They are produced free from any political interference.

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6. Details of the policy governing the release of new data are available by visiting www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/index.html or from the Media Relations Office email: media.relations@ons.gsi.gov.uk

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