

Research Context

Over this academic year, I had the pleasure to work with Professor Paul Apostolidis of LSE's Department of Government on his book project titled *Night Work and the Politics of Freedom*, which investigates the growing phenomenon of night-time labour in dialogue with Marxist Feminist political theorists. My work focused on a book chapter on night-time child care in the United States as key field of research with low-wage night labourers. I was tasked with conducting primary and secondary research in the childcare sector in the U.S., from interviews with childcare centres to summaries of research papers and policy initiatives. With the expansion of paid night-time care and platform-based employment reshaping both parents' care for their children and the wellbeing of providers, night-time childcare proves fertile ground to investigate capital's systemic undermining of working people's freedom, capacity to care for themselves, and ability to tend to others.

Methodology

The initial stage of my research focused on reading and summarising key policy papers and research articles on childcare in the United States, with a focus on night-time care. Several policies caught my attention from the beginning, especially those focusing on improving compensation and support for providers, which became the foundation for the next steps of the research.

What followed was gathering first-hand testimonies from people working directly in the childcare sector – nannies, childcare centres, home-based providers, and union workers. Such primary research was essential in order to corroborate empirical findings with qualitative ones, and to understand first-hand the experiences of those who live the realities I was researching. I conducted extensive outreach through social media, government websites, childcare platforms, and word of mouth, before contacting individual stakeholders by email to set interviews. I was able to conduct 20 interviews with a diverse demographic: home-based nannies and unlicensed providers, childcare centres, union leaders, NGO workers and advocacy organisations. Following each interview, I re-read the transcripts and conducted thematic analyses, structuring notes around key themes and trends. Once all interviews were completed, I carried out a systemic analysis uncovering recurring trends, differences in experiences between types of stakeholders, and shifts in the main themes, all supplemented throughout by the policy papers and research articles previously analysed.

Findings

Although the book is an ongoing project, the findings of my research were meaningful and substantially informed the overall chapter. The main source of findings was the primary research itself: speaking directly to those affected by the changing childcare landscape allowed me to translate first-hand experiences into wider academic research, raising awareness on a type of work that is both vital and invisible.

Interviews emphasised a growing demand for night-time childcare following increased cost of living and a rise in shift work. Night-time provision is often an opportunity for providers to earn more money in difficult times, creating a trade-off between the physical and emotional strain of working nights and the increased monetary compensation. Providers tend to sacrifice the former for the latter, wholly yielding their freedom to capital for survival, thus corroborating what *Night Work and the Politics of Freedom* seeks to investigate. Whilst providers note that nights are “more peaceful” as children are asleep, the constant state of alertness, disruption to the circadian rhythm, and sleep deprivation negatively impact their wellbeing in the long run.

A further trend reflected in my primary research is the racialised and gendered dynamics that characterise this work. All except two interviewees were women, and most were BIPOC. They often experienced discrimination: some families refuse to entrust their child to providers from a different ethnic background, or treat them as maids as well as caregivers, asking them to clean or do dishes (tasks for which they are rarely compensated).

The demographics of families seeking night-time childcare reflect yet another characteristic of capitalism: class divide. Some families must make ends meet through night shifts and have no choice but to find care (typically single parents, factory workers, healthcare workers), while others from higher-income households seek night care as a matter of choice rather than necessity (new parents in the postpartum phase who simply want overnight support to rest and recover). This divide reveals that access to night-time childcare is not simply a logistical matter, but a deeply classed experience shaped less by the needs of the child than by the economic circumstances of the family.

Overall, the findings strongly supported Professor Apostolidis' project. The "politics of freedom" that the childcare sector uncovers is undeniable, and policy should therefore move beyond piecemeal interventions and address the structural conditions that force workers to trade their wellbeing, time, and freedom for economic survival.

Personal Reflections

Working on this project has been one of the most intellectually rewarding experiences of my academic journey. Engaging directly with the people who live these realities made the theoretical frameworks of Marxist-feminist literature feel immediate and urgent rather than abstract. It deepened my understanding of how structural forces play out in the most intimate spaces of everyday life, and reinforced my commitment to research for those whose labour is too often invisible.

This assistantship offered a rare behind-the-scenes look into academic research at its most human level, sitting with transcripts, listening to the stories of care workers, and watching how lived experience becomes academic research. I am incredibly grateful to Professor Apostolidis and to the Phelan Centre for making this opportunity possible. As someone passionate about social justice and the politics of labour, this project has been one of the most meaningful and rewarding experiences of my year at LSE.