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Key Findings – Summary Report 2025

The Sunday Night Blues

Feeling down and anxious in
anticipation of the working week –
what can we do about it?



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We thank all participants for taking part
in this study and supporting our research.



Want to share your experience and leave a comment?

Get in touch: https://exe.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_0TYZGqG5kSagGF0



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Overview

Do you feel down or anxious in anticipation of the start of the working week? If so, you are not alone. In our study 79% of people indicated that they currently experience the **Sunday Night Blues** or have experienced it in the past. Our project explores how to alleviate the Sunday Night Blues. Here we report preliminary findings of our ongoing research programme.

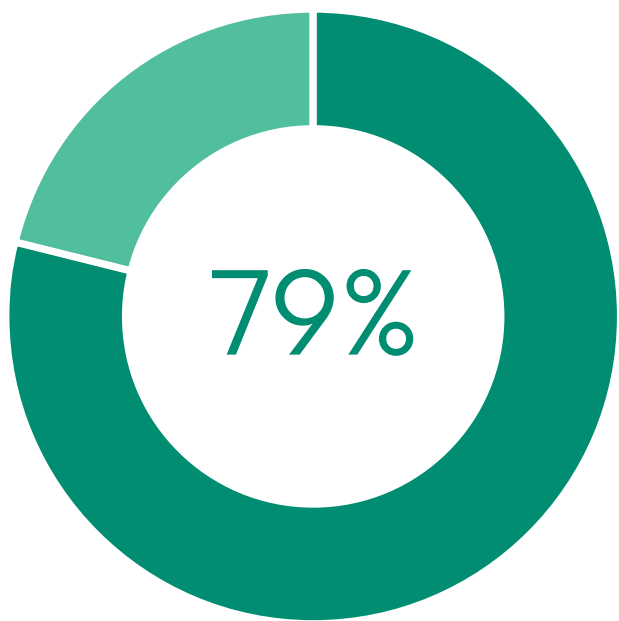


“

Sunday to Monday is a tough transition mentally. ”

Participant

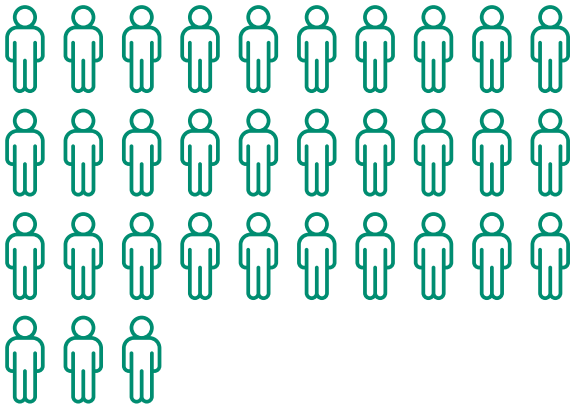
DATA FROM OUR STUDY SHOWS



79% of people experience the Sunday Night Blues or have experienced it in the past



We surveyed nearly 600 people and conducted in-depth interviews with 33 employees to understand their experience of the Sunday Night Blues



- Those who experience the SNB describe feeling anxious, stressed, worried and a sense of dread
- Of those who don't experience it, some feel relaxed and prepared, others are busy with weekend admin tasks
- People generally reported a dip in energy between Sunday morning and Sunday evening
- Sunday evening 'switch off' activities can help
- Reshaping meetings and being mindful of not setting tasks on a Friday unless urgent, can also help alleviate the Sunday Night Blues

This report summarises our preliminary findings and provides some guidance for employees, line managers and HR Directors, including strategies to combat the Sunday Night Blues. Simple changes such as rescheduling kick-off meetings at the beginning of the week and broader flexible working options can make a big difference.

Background

The Sunday Night Blues (also referred to as the “Sunday Scaries”) is associated with feelings of worry and anxiousness on Sunday evening in anticipation of the work week ahead.

In October 2022, the UK Government reported that “1 in 7 Brits regularly experience the ‘Sunday Scaries’”, raising this as an issue in a mental health campaign (Department of Health & Social Care, 2022: www.gov.uk/government/news/every-mind-matters-campaign-urges-people-to-be-kind-to-their-mind)

The Sunday Night Blues is associated with feelings of worry and anxiousness on Sunday evening in anticipation of one’s impending work week (Rook & Zijlstra, 2006).

Most advice frames it as a self-care problem rather than a work-based issue. Fluctuations in mood across the week have been researched in the past (for example, Ryan et al., 2010; Sonnentag, 2015; Stone et al., 2012; Weigelt et al. 2021). While some recent research shows that people feel down on Sundays compared to other weekdays (Akay & Martinsson, 2009) and report on Monday mornings to have slept less well, these effects tend to be small, and overall findings on the Sunday Night Blues have not been conclusive.

The [Banishing the Sunday Night Blues research programme](#) set out to examine the experience of the Sunday Night Blues, uncover the factors that contribute to it, and explore the positive steps that employees, line managers, and HR Directors can take to alleviate the Sunday Night Blues.

This summary report is part of a longer project to develop a toolkit for banishing the Sunday Night Blues. Kirstin Furber approached the University of Exeter to form a collaboration to deliver evidence-based solutions to alleviate the Sunday Night Blues. You can read more on Kirstin’s [website](#). Watch our TEDx talk [here](#), and see our feature in The Guardian [here](#).





“

Sunday never feels like a day off. There's always too much preparation for the following week. Myself and most of my friends get the Sunday night dread. It's an awful feeling. ”

Participant



If the topics discussed in this report resonate with you and you would like to share any comments or have questions, please get in touch: https://exe.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_0TYZGqG5kSagGF0

Why is it important?



Mental health

In 2023, poor mental health in the workplace cost the UK economy £102 billion

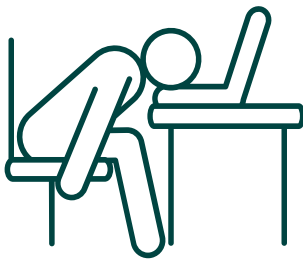
- research by AXA UK (2024)





Productivity

Productivity in the UK is lower than comparable economies, and how we feel about work impacts performance in our jobs



Satisfaction

Even those who are happy in their job experience the Sunday Night Blues



Workforce

The UK is experiencing skills shortages and talent loss is increasing. The average cost of turnover for a business is £30,614 per employee

- research by Oxford Economics and Unum (BrightHR, 2024)

Our results

Many people report experiencing the so-called “Sunday Evening/ Night Blues” – feeling low or anxious on a Sunday evening in anticipation of the start of the work week.

Have you experienced the Sunday Evening Blues?



Of the 595 people we surveyed in March 2023 who responded to this question, 37.3% were currently experiencing the Sunday Night Blues, and a further 42% had experienced it in the past.

There were no differences between genders in the prevalence of the Sunday Night Blues. However, it was experienced more by those who are younger. The average age for those currently experiencing it was four years lower than those who said they are not experiencing the Sunday Night Blues. This aligns with research showing that as people get older, they tend to manage their emotions differently and often feel happier overall (e.g. Charles & Carstensen, 2008; Dello Russo et al., 2021; Freund et al, 2009; Warr, 2001).

Most of our respondents were full time employed and had been in their job for between 6 months and 15 years. There was an equal split between male and female participants. We captured a range of ages with an overall average age of 38 for survey study 1 and 39 for survey study 2. Some had second jobs and at least 3% had been in their role for more than 25 years. Sample descriptives of our survey studies can be found at the end of the report under “Details of the Study”.

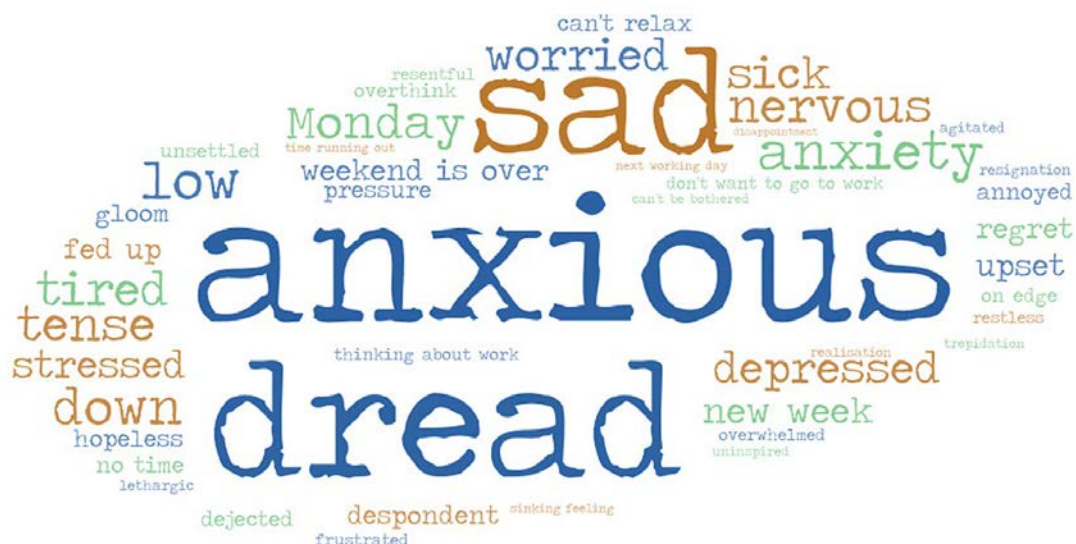


Average age of respondents and whether they experience the Sunday Night Blues

How does it feel?

We gave our respondents an opportunity to tell us how the Sunday Night Blues feels, and what they're thinking when they experience it, via open text questions in our survey. Answers reflected feelings of anxiety and dread, with some people feeling hopeless and stressed. They were overwhelmingly thinking about work, both the amount they have to do and any issues or problems they may face in the coming week.

We asked: If 'yes': Can you describe the experience? What do you feel?



“

A sense of dread about
the following day. ”

How much I have
to do in the week.”

[illegible]

How does it change?

For those who previously experienced the Sunday Night Blues, we asked why they thought it had stopped. Answers reflected changes in people's work and non-work life and attitudes. For example, this included moving jobs entirely, spending more time with family and friends and altering their weekend routines. These results also show how the workplace holistically impacts an employee's life.

We asked: If 'previously': Why do you think you stopped experiencing the Sunday Night Blues?



“

I still do, just not every Sunday. The times I don't experience it is most likely to have been at the end of a very relaxing weekend, especially if I've spent time with my toddler nephew.

”

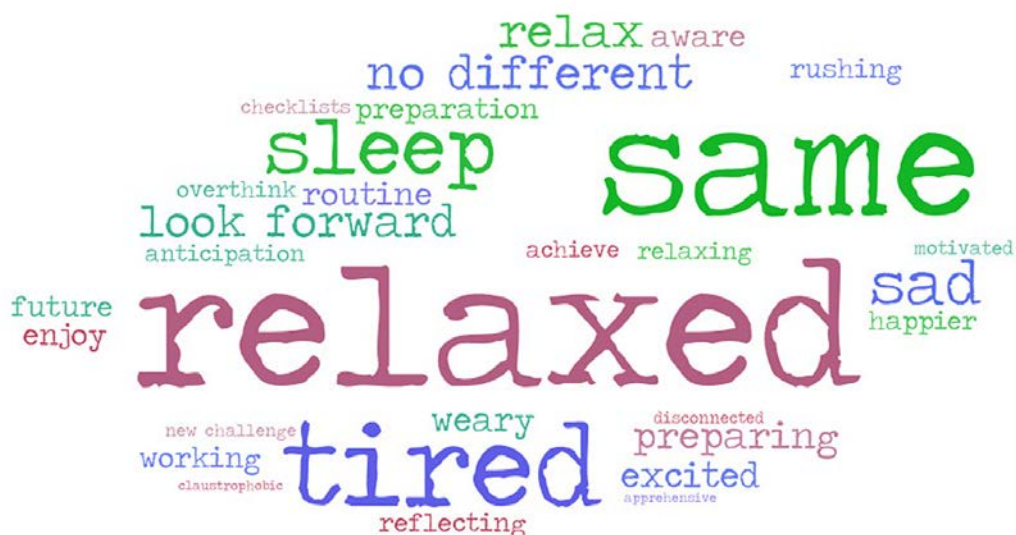
Preparing for the week

Even for those people who do not experience the Sunday Night Blues, Sunday evening seems to be a distinct time of the week. Open responses showed that people who don't experience the Sunday Night Blues also have a variety of experiences on Sunday which include being busy preparing for the week ahead.

While some participants reported feeling relaxed, others described feeling apprehensive, tired or weary. However, they did not associate this with the negative impacts commonly linked to the Sunday Night Blues. Even if they are not excited about the upcoming work week, these respondents may still feel prepared for it.

More research is needed to understand the differences between those who do and don't experience the Sunday Night Blues. Although only 21% of our respondents reported a different experience on Sunday nights, their perspective is crucial for improving workplace wellbeing.

We asked participants who did not experience the Sunday Night Blues:
If your Sunday Night is different, how?



“

Sundays are spent preparing ready for Monday morning.”

Changes in energy

Across several Sundays and Mondays, we asked our survey respondents to tell us about their energy levels.

To assess participants' self-reported energy, we used the "battery" measure pictured below (pictorial energy scale, developed by Weigelt et al., 2021).

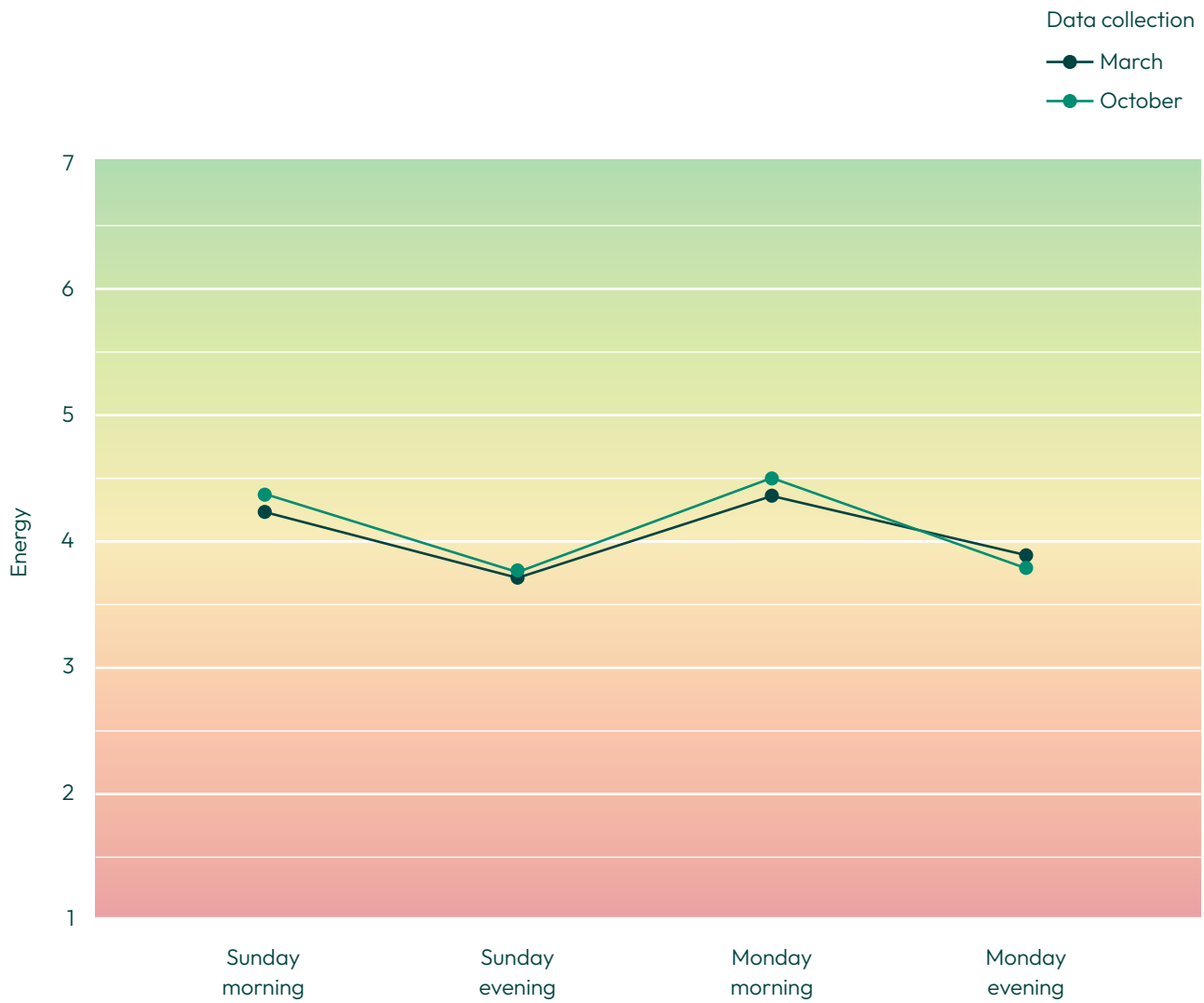
This is a way of expressing how energised you are feeling at a particular time on a scale that is easily understood by all. We asked participants to record their energy levels at two different times on Sunday and Monday. This was repeated in several rounds of the survey (i.e. across several weekends in two survey studies) and we measured their changes.

Participants experienced a dip in energy from Sunday morning to Sunday evening, followed by a positive rebound effect on Monday morning (i.e. energy being high) and a decrease during Monday, as reflected in participants' responses in the evening. Energy levels were lowest on Sunday evening – even compared to Monday evening, after the working day. These changes in energy across Sundays and Mondays are noticeable.



“

Feeling a bit relaxed after a weekend but apprehensive of the week ahead.”



Contributing factors



Workload

“remember the mountain... that will hit you on Monday”



Unfinished tasks

“...it’s the dread of didn’t quite get everything done the previous week”



Culture

Receiving emails over the weekend, general lack of work/home boundaries and very few people role-modelling a healthy work-life balance in the organisation



Challenging meetings

Knowing there will be difficult work situations in the week ahead

Finding it hard to say ‘no’

Our in-depth interviews revealed that a range of factors contribute to the Sunday Night Blues. A preoccupation with work, or an unhealthy culture in the workplace, exacerbates the anticipation of the working week. This sometimes combines with individual factors such as lacking assertiveness in saying “no” to new projects or tasks when people feel that their workload is already high.





What can we do?

Managers & HR Directors

RESHAPE MONDAY MORNINGS

Don't hold dreary operational meetings on a Monday morning. If you must schedule meetings first thing on Monday morning, have a clear agenda, keep it short and make it a positive experience

Employees

PROTECT YOUR SUNDAYS

If you must work on Sunday, be disciplined and time box your work

BE A ROLE MODEL

Walk the talk: set clear work/life boundaries, both for your own benefit and to set an example to your team

MINDFUL FRIDAY AFTERNOONS

Don't assign tasks on a Friday afternoon unless it is business critical. Be clear about priorities of new projects/tasks

ACTIVITIES TO SWITCH OFF

Physical exercise, socialising, or something fun - have a plan for Sunday evening

TALK TO SOMEONE

Friends, family, partners or work colleagues - find someone to share with

Get involved

We want to spread the word and BANISH THE SUNDAY NIGHT BLUES together.



Want to share your experience and leave a comment?

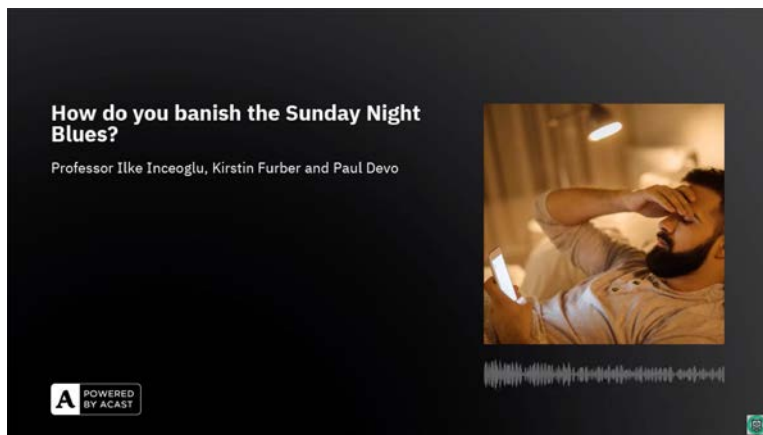
Get in touch: https://exe.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_0TYZGqG5kSagGF0

About us

Professor Ilke Inceoglu, Leah Boundy, Dr Dimitris Batolas and Professor Leroy White work at the University of Exeter Business School. Dr Jonathan Bird is at the Institute of Sport, Exercise and Health and the Department of Targeted Intervention, UCL. DIGIT Lab is an EPSRC Next Stage Digital Economy Centre delivering a five year research programme backed by £12.4m in funding. It works with Large Established Organisations (LEOs) to understand barriers to productivity improvements through digital transformation using responsible and sustainable approaches to innovation.



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WATCH OUR TEDx TALK



Access support

If you feel, reflecting on your mood, that you experience increased stress, support is available here:

NHS: If you need urgent help for your mental health, get help from 111 online or call 111 and select the mental health option. <https://www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/mental-health-services/>

Mind: <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/helplines/>

Samaritans: phone number: 116 123 or email: jo@samaritans.org

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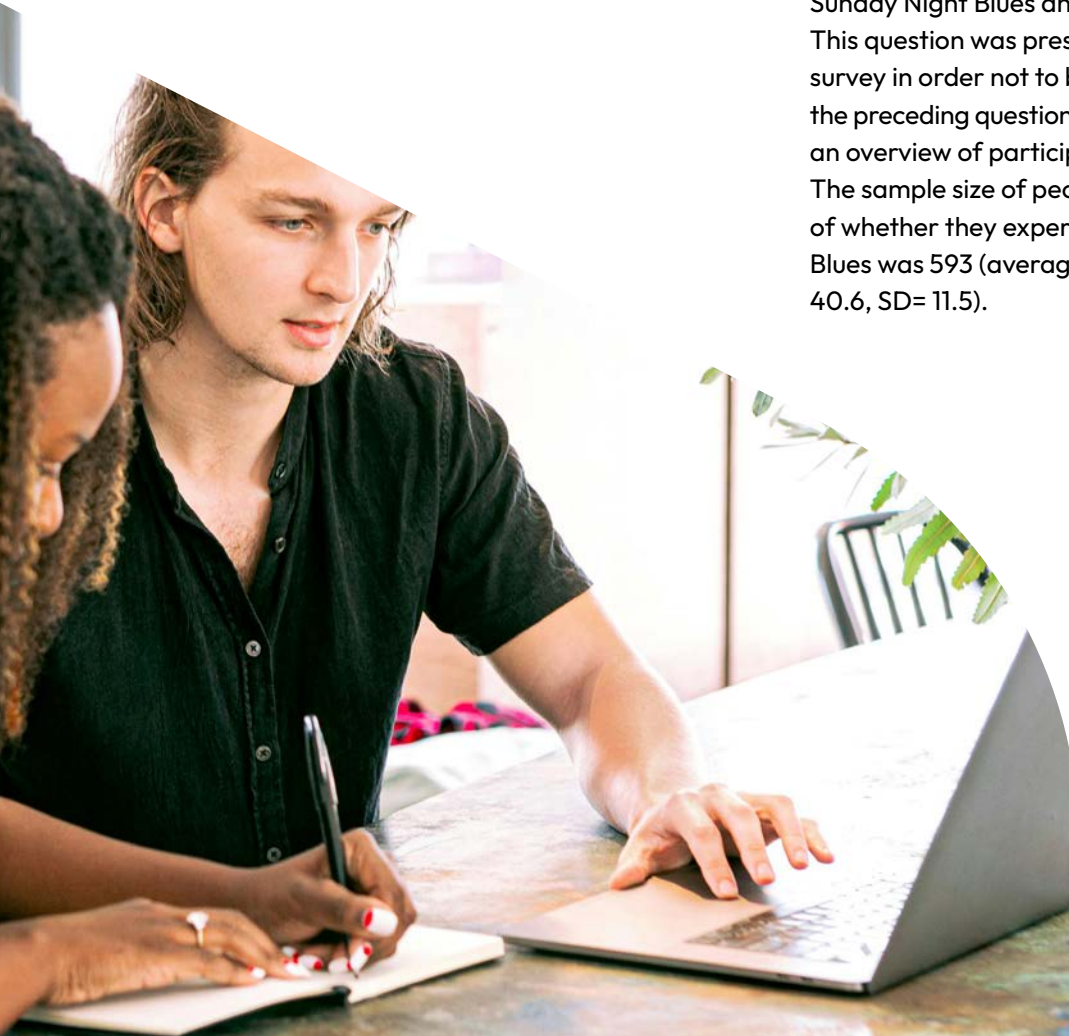
Details of the study

We collected data using interviews and surveys. Findings summarised in this report are based on data collected in 2022 and 2023. This research project and data collections were reviewed and approved by the University of Exeter's Ethics Committee.

We interviewed 33 employees and managers who currently experienced the Sunday Night Blues or had experienced it in the past, and conducted two survey studies with participants recruited via Prolific Academic (paid panel) and our professional networks such as LinkedIn and X (Twitter). In both survey studies, participants completed a baseline survey to capture information about their work and demographic information. In survey Study 1, conducted in October 2022, participants were then asked to complete brief online surveys on Sundays and Mondays across three weekends (12 in total).

In survey Study 2, conducted in March 2023, we aimed to confirm results and recruited another independent sample via Prolific Academic, this time inviting participants to complete brief online surveys on Sundays and Mondays across two weekends (eight in total), following the baseline survey.

In all short surveys we measured people's energy levels, using a pictorial scale (Weigelt et al., 2021). We also invited participants to share their experiences via open responses. In Study 2, we asked participants directly whether they experienced the Sunday Night Blues and to describe the experience. This question was presented at the end of the final survey in order not to bias participants' responses to the preceding questions. The box to the right provides an overview of participants for both survey studies. The sample size of people responding to the question of whether they experienced the Sunday Night Blues was 593 (average age of this sub sample: 40.6, SD= 11.5).



Participants

In total, there were 1,484 participants who completed a baseline survey and at least one further survey (592 in 2022, and 892 the following year). The mean age of participants was 39, and the male/female balance was 50/50. Most of our participants were employed full-time. We asked participants how long they had been working in their current role, and there was a broad range of responses, with most falling in the 2-5 or 5-10 year range.

The project is ongoing and we are working on academic papers for publication in peer reviewed journals that will provide greater detail and in-depth analysis of the data.

Funding for this project was provided by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), part of UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), Channel 4, Investors in People, Motability Operations and DigitLab. Versions of this research have been presented on podcasts and in media coverage.



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