

UK: Working-class people in dangerous occupations most likely to die from COVID-19

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1 February 2021

The Office of National Statistics (ONS) has confirmed that working-class people are most likely to die from COVID-19 in England and Wales.

Its report, “Coronavirus (COVID-19) related deaths by occupation, England and Wales,” covers deaths registered between March 9 and December 28, 2020.

The survey covers deaths “involving the coronavirus (COVID-19), by different occupational groups, among men and women aged 20 to 64 years in England and Wales.” It found that “7,961 deaths involving the coronavirus (COVID-19) in the working age population” were registered during the period surveyed. The almost 8,000 deaths recorded represented a twelfth of all coronavirus deaths at the time of publication.

The ONS notes, “When looking at broad groups of occupations, men who worked in elementary occupations (699 deaths) or caring, leisure and other service occupations (258 deaths) had the highest rates of death involving COVID-19, with 66.3 and 64.1 deaths per 100,000 males, respectively.”

Elementary occupations include postal workers, builders, cleaners, security staff and professions generally not requiring a qualification. The second highest death rate revealed by the statistics was among workers employed in caring, leisure and other service occupations.

The top 10 occupations of men who died from COVID-19 were taxi and cab drivers (209 deaths), security guards (140), large goods vehicle drivers (118), storage workers (111), care workers/home carers (107) processing plant workers (100), van drivers (97), builders (85), bus and coach drivers (83), chefs (82).

Among women, “process, plant and machine operatives (57 deaths) and caring, leisure and other service occupations (460 deaths) had the highest rates of death involving COVID-19 when looking at broad occupational groups, with 33.7 and 27.3 deaths per 100,000 females, respectively.”

The top 10 occupations in which women have died from COVID-19 are: care workers/home carers (240 deaths), sales assistants (111), nurses (110), cleaners (95), other

administrative jobs (58), nursing assistants (54), teaching assistants (37), kitchen/catering assistants (36), personal assistants (30), payroll managers/clerks (26), government administrators (26).

In total there were 594 deaths in the care sector. One in seven of all working-age women who died from the disease last year were care workers. Of 2,833 women aged between 20 and 64 who died after catching COVID-19, 400 worked in care services. This is the highest number of women to have died in any single profession category.

Social care occupations had a “statistically significantly higher rates of death involving COVID-19 when compared with rates of death involving COVID-19 in the population among those of the same age and sex.” In these occupations there were 79.0 deaths per 100,000 among males and a total of 150 deaths, and 35.9 deaths per 100,000 among females, with 319 total deaths.

The lives of hundreds of social care workers employed in the care sector were sacrificed by Prime Minister Boris Johnson’s Conservative government, which ruthlessly implemented a herd immunity policy. In the first weeks of the pandemic, the government flooded care homes with elderly and vulnerable people who had been in hospital. Many were not tested for COVID-19.

As a result, over 18,000 residents and staff members died. The ONS report notes, “Almost three in four of the deaths involving COVID-19 in social care occupations (347 out of 469 deaths; 74.0%) were in care workers and home carers, with 109.9 deaths per 100,000 males (107 deaths) and 47.1 deaths per 100,000 females (240 deaths).”

The ONS reports that for the period surveyed there were “139 deaths involving the coronavirus (COVID-19) in teaching and educational professionals aged 20 to 64 years”.

This is a massive underestimate of the real number of educators’ deaths. ONS minimises fatalities by only including deaths among 20 to 64 year olds. The real number of deaths among education staff is at least 570. Deaths among teachers and educators, according to the ONS, had already reached 148 by last June.

The *Times Educational Supplement* noted the significance of omitting deaths among those over 64. According to the ONS figures, 75 primary and secondary teachers aged 20 to 64 died with Covid between March and December last year, but “this number more than doubles to 158 once staff aged 65 and over more [sic] are included.”

The Tory Fibs Twitter page, which records deaths among all educators, including in further and higher education, reports that the real figure “is at least 217 & climbs to 570 if you count those older than 64.”

Given that the ONS figures for overall deaths in *all occupations* only count those aged 20 to 64, its under-reporting of deaths among education staff will be replicated throughout the UK workforce.

Despite government lockdown guidance that workers should work at home in those occupations that allow it, companies are routinely herding staff into offices that are previously unacknowledged transmission vectors for COVID-19.

The ONS reports 364 deaths in administrative occupations. The dangers facing office workers has been massive downplayed throughout the pandemic, despite outbreaks at headquarter buildings of corporations and at call centres, including one that has ripped through the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) HQ in Wales in recent months. At least 530 workers at the site have tested positive. Last week, it was reported that a worker employed there had died.

This is just one of many outbreaks in office settings. Figures obtained this week from Public Health England via a Freedom of Information request from BBC 5 Live, revealed that there were than 60 suspected Covid outbreaks in offices in just the first two weeks of the current lockdown in England, beginning January 6.

The BBC reported, “The data from Public Health England, obtained by the 5 Live Investigations team, lists the different types of workplaces where there have been clusters of cases. The figures reveal for the first time which are the most susceptible to Covid outbreaks, with offices coming top.

“The data showed there were more than 500 outbreaks, or suspected outbreaks, in offices in the second half of 2020—more than in supermarkets, construction sites, warehouses, restaurants and cafes combined.”

Both reports underscore the criminality of the government’s herd immunity policy, which has led to the UK recording over 106,000 deaths, the fifth highest death toll in the world. Other countries with a death toll higher than 100,000— India, Mexico, Brazil and the United States—all have far larger populations than Britain.

The real number of deaths in the UK is, moreover, substantially higher than the government measure. According to a *Financial Times* model there had been an

estimated 120,200 excess deaths by last week.

The figures made available from the Office of National Statistics and Public Health England add to a growing body of evidence confirming that the disease impacts most severely on the working class.

An ONS report released in May, “Deaths involving COVID-19 by local area and socioeconomic deprivation,” established that those residing in the most deprived communities are more than twice as likely to die from the coronavirus than those in the wealthiest districts.

The government and employers could never have imposed such mass losses of lives in workplaces without the assistance of the Labour Party and the trade unions, who have worked in a de facto coalition government with the Tories. Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer has continued the stance of his predecessor Jeremy Corbyn and offered to back Prime Minister Boris Johnson with “constructive criticism” in the “national interest”.

The trade unions never lifted a finger to ensure a full lockdown and the safety and necessary financial support for millions of workers. They have overseen the deaths of thousands of their members and worked with the government to ensure a “mass return to work” by prematurely ending the limited national spring lockdown.

Responding to the ONS deaths by occupation report, Trades Union Congress (TUC) General Secretary Frances O’Grady had the gall to state that workplace Covid-19 deaths have been “vastly under-reported”. She added, “Everyone should be safe at work. But this pandemic has exposed huge inequalities in our labour market. People working in low-paid and insecure jobs have been forced to shoulder much higher risk, with too many losing their lives.”

The TUC will do nothing to oppose any of this, with O’Grady stating only that “The *Government* urgently needs to beef up its workplace safety guidance and get tough on employers who put their workers in harm’s way.”



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