

## Factsheet 04

# Working non-stop? A plea for breaks

The Stress Report Germany 2012 shows clearly that employed persons are frequently confronted with mental demands. It is therefore all the more important to pay attention to sufficient recreation. However, nowadays over one quarter of employed persons do not have a break during work. This Factsheet provides information on the groups of employed persons to which this applies in particular and what working conditions and health issues are associated with this. The results of the latest BIBB/BAuA Employment Survey 2012 will be presented – the self-employed and freelancers are not taken into account.

### Recreation and breaks

The Federal Paid Leave Act, for example, determines specific framework conditions for recreation in the context of work. The provisions of the Working Time Act are intended to enable daily recreation. Along with minimum rest periods between the end and the resumption of work, or rest from work on Sundays and public holidays, it prescribes that employees may not be employed for longer than 6 hours consecutively without a break: anyone who has worked for more than 6 hours must take a 30-minute break, although this is also permitted in the form of two 15-minute breaks.

### Breaks not taken – who and why?

The actual breaks situation was determined from over 17,000 employees in the BIBB/BAuA Employment Survey. Over a quarter (26%) answered 'yes' to the question whether breaks (over 15 minutes) were frequently not taken during working days of over 6 hours.

Women in full-time employment tend not to take breaks (31%) more often than men in full-time employment (27%), and managerial staff (36%) more often than employees (21%). Female managerial staff in full-time employment are most likely to neglect their breaks, 41% in comparison with 35% of male managerial staff in full-time employment. There are even greater differences in a comparison of occupations, as shown in Fig. 1: above all employees in health (43%) and in social/education-related and security occupations (each 36%) stated that they frequently did not take a break. The incidence of breaks not being taken is considerably lower in metal/mechanical engineering occupations (16%), in metal production and foundries and in other production occupations (17%) and in electrical occupations (18%).

People tend to continue working because the break does not fit into the workflow (47%), followed by too much work (38%). Only 15% continue to work because they do not want to take a break themselves. However, there are differences between men and women in this point: women tend to explain the lack of a break with having too much to do (f = 45%; m = 32%), men tend to see the cause as the inability to fit the break into the workflow (f = 41%; m = 53%). This difference is linked to the work, because in occupations in which women are in the majority (e.g. health occupations) having too much to do also predominates as a reason.

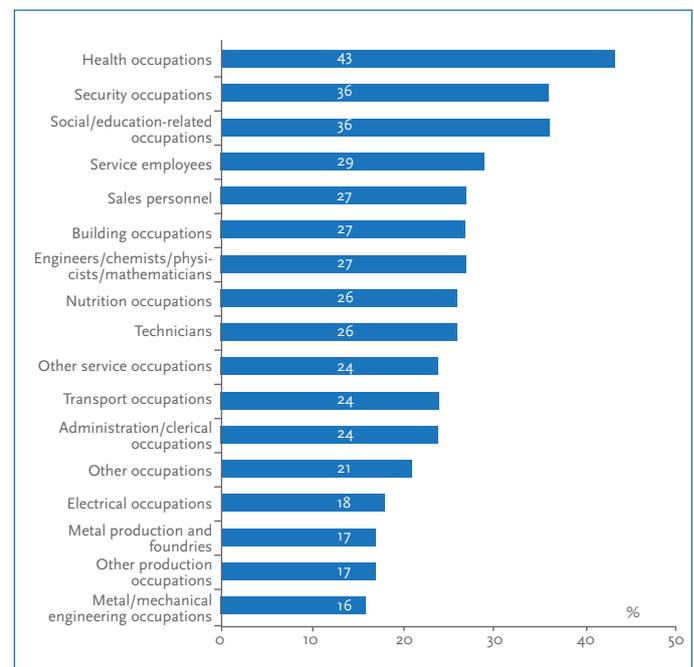


Fig. 1: Percentage of employees per occupation group who state that they frequently do not take a break

## Non-stop mental stress

It appears that recreation comes off badly in particular in those occupations in which mental stress is high. As Fig. 2 makes clear, in comparison with employees who are seldom under emotional stress, those who are frequently exposed to mentally stressful work situations (46%), frequently have to deal with several things at once (43%), or are affected by pressure to meet deadlines and to perform (35%), take breaks less often. And this also applies to those who work more than 40 hours per week (37%). In brief: those who have most need of a break are more likely not to take one.

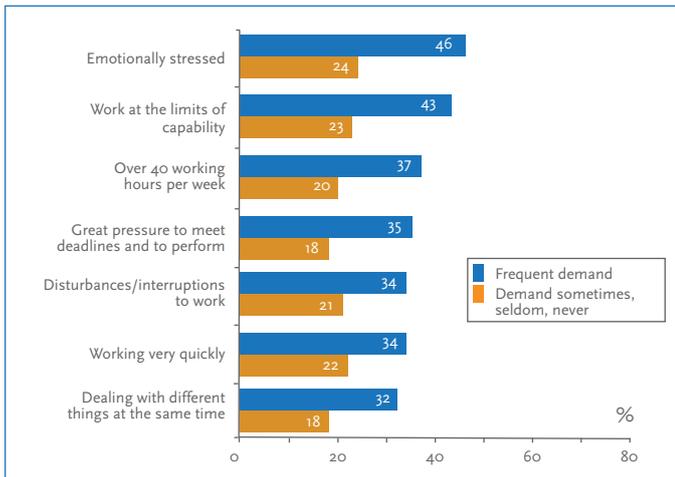


Fig. 2: Frequency of not taking a break among employees who indicate the demands frequently or sometimes, seldom or never

## Working non-stop and health

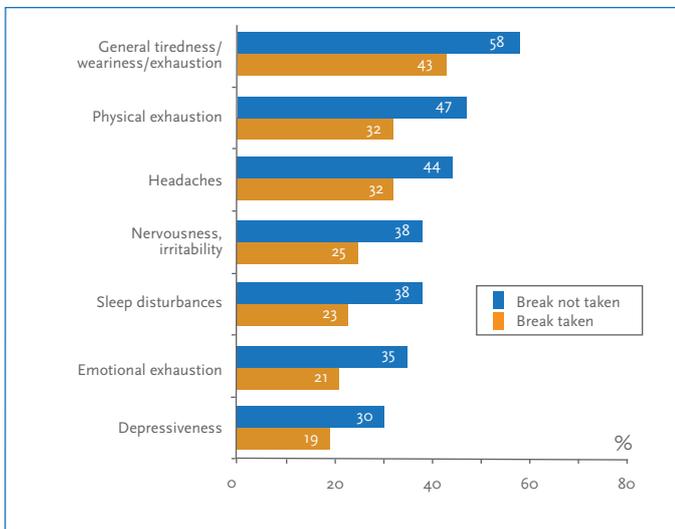


Fig. 3: Frequency of psychosomatic complaints in employees who take breaks and who do not take breaks

A look at the perceived state of health shows that there are only slight differences between employees who take breaks and those who do not. However, an exception is seen in the psychosomatic complaints, as shown in Fig. 3: for example, over half of those who do not take breaks say that they feel tired, weary or exhausted (58%); this figure is only 43% for those who take their breaks. The difference is very clear with sleep disorders as well: 38% of those who do not take breaks claim problems with sleeping, but only 23% of those who take a break.

## Good reasons for breaks

Studies show that a sustained high level of intensity of work or overtime has a negative effect on people's condition and health. Working through without a break can also lead to impairments of health, because the longer recreation is postponed, the greater is the exhaustion – especially as it increases disproportionately over time. And it then takes longer to recover after work. Frequent working through without a break can contribute to a so-called "recovery debt" that causes chronic overtiredness and exhaustion and leads to further impairments to health.

## What can be done?

In the course of changes to work, employees are increasingly faced with mental stress in many areas. The nature of work today is often such that it is no longer physical exhaustion that signals that a break is necessary. Here, people should be increasingly sensitised to the reasons for and the necessity of breaks. In addition, corporate cultures in which working through without a break is seen as an indicator of diligence and performance should be examined critically. And when work is organised, breaks should be taken into account both for the workflow and for personnel allocation.

## Have a break!

Everyone in companies should pay greater attention to this once more: employers, managers and the employees themselves.

## Would you like to know more about this?

The brochure "Im Takt?" provides information on flexible working hours models, taking account of aspects of health and recreation as well ([www.baua.de/dok/697378](http://www.baua.de/dok/697378)). You can find more information on working conditions in Germany at [www.baua.de/arbeitsbedingungen](http://www.baua.de/arbeitsbedingungen). In addition, the Stress Report Germany 2012 is available for download at [www.baua.de/dok/3430796](http://www.baua.de/dok/3430796).

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