

# Working at the limit

Higher demands, more negative health outcomes

## 24 baua: Facts

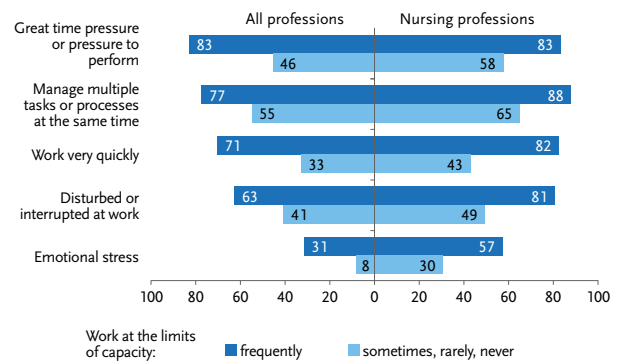
Those who frequently work at the limits of their capacities often face additional mental and physical demands at work. They tend to feel more burdened and more frequently suffer from psychosomatic complaints such as fatigue, exhaustion, or irritability. In addition, they increasingly report musculoskeletal complaints, such as pain in the shoulder and neck area. In the BIBB/BAuA Employment Survey 2012, psychosomatic complaints were reported more often than musculoskeletal complaints.

Previous analyses of the BIBB/BAuA Employment Survey 2012 have shown that around 16 % of employees often work at the limit of their capacities. 74 % of them experience this as a burden<sup>1</sup>. In the nursing occupations, the reported workload is even higher, with 30 % often working at the limit of their capacities and 85 % feeling burdened by it<sup>2</sup>. Additional demands from employers add to this burden<sup>3</sup>. What exactly are these demands? And which health-related consequences result from working at the limit? To answer these questions, this fact sheet provides information on employees subject to social insurance requirements who were interviewed in the BIBB/BAuA Employment Survey 2012 (n = 17,562). The most affected group included employees in the nursing occupations, including health care nurses, paediatric nurses, midwives, maternity nurses, and geriatric nurses. This group will therefore be considered separately (n = 728).

### Mental demands

When employees often reach their capacity limits, this often goes along with high mental demands arising from their activity (Fig. 1). Thus 83 % of them experience pressure to meet deadlines or pressure to perform. Among employees who sometimes, rarely, or never reach their limit, only 46 % indicate this pressure. Likewise, those who often manage multiple tasks or processes at the same time, work very quickly, and are disturbed or interrupted at work more often work at the limits of their capacities. Among employees who only sometimes, rarely, or never reach their capacity limits, 8 % report emotional stress. Among those frequently working at the limit, this proportion is almost four times as high (31 %). Employees in the

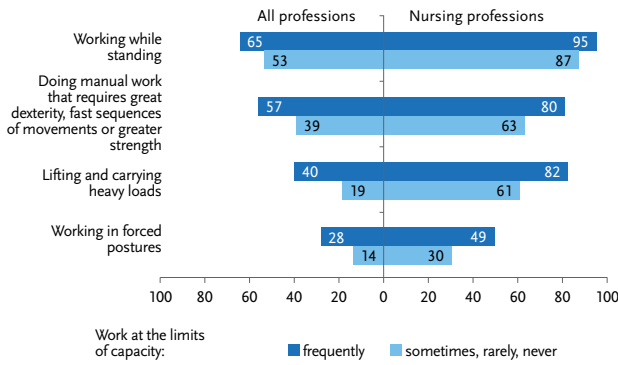
nursing occupations frequently working at the limit of their capacities are almost twice as likely to experience emotional burdens (57 %) than colleagues who do not often work at the limits of their capacities (30 %).



**Fig. 1** Mental work demands on employees subject to social insurance requirements who frequently or sometimes, rarely, or never reach the limit of their capacities (in %)

### Physical demands

Physical workplace demands also affect those who often work at the limit of their capacity (Fig. 2). Compared to those who only sometimes, rarely, or never experience such working conditions, they are twice as likely to report physical stress such as frequently lifting and carrying heavy loads (40 % vs. 19 %) and frequently working in forced postures (28 % vs. 14 %). In the nursing occupations, these differences are also noticeable. Owing to the high physical demands in care work, the values were significantly higher overall compared to other occupations. The necessity of frequently lifting and carrying heavy loads, for example, arises from the need to reposition patients on a regular basis.

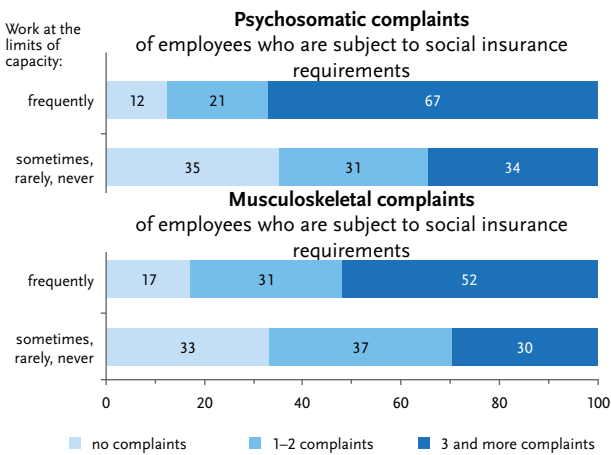


**Fig. 2** Physical work demands of employees subject to social insurance requirements who frequently or sometimes, rarely, or never reach the limit of their capacities (in %)

**Health**

Those who frequently work at the limits of their capacity feel less healthy. Only 20 % of employees who often work at their limits report their general state of health as “very good” or “excellent”, compared to 34 % of employees who sometimes, rarely, or never reach their limits at work.

Likewise, employees who frequently work at the limits of their capacities more often claim to be affected by the aforementioned mental and physical demands. In addition, psychosomatic complaints and musculoskeletal complaints are more common (Fig. 3). Whereas 67 % of all employees who often work at the limits of their capacities report three and more psychosomatic complaints, only 34 % of employees who sometimes, rarely, or never reach their limits report three and more psychosomatic complaints.



**Fig. 3** Health complaints of employees subject to social insurance requirements who frequently or sometimes, rarely, or never reach the limit of their capacities (in %)

Three or more musculoskeletal complaints were reported by 52 % of all employees who often work at the limit of their capacities, compared to 30 % of employees who sometimes, rarely, or never reach that limit at work. Psychosomatic complaints, therefore, are somewhat more prevalent than musculoskeletal complaints. Psychosomatic and musculoskeletal complaints are more common among care workers, who often work at their capacity limits, than among all other workers.

**Conclusion**

Frequently working at the limits of capacity is perceived as a burden by employees and accompanied by health problems. At the same time, employees often face other stressful mental and physical demands. Employers should take appropriate measures, such as hiring more staff, setting realistic goals with employees, and offering further training. New technologies should also be reviewed to see whether they can facilitate employees’ day-to-day work<sup>4</sup>. Especially in occupations with particularly high mental and physical demands, such as nursing, high-quality training programmes must be designed.

**Further Information**

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- 3 I. Rothe, L. Adolph, B. Beermann, M. Schütte, A. Windel, A. Grewer, U. Lenhardt, J. Michel, B. Thomson, M. Formazin, 2017: Mental Health in the Working World - Determining the current state of scientific evidence. 1. edition. Dortmund: BAuA. Available at: [www.baua.de/dok/8732366](http://www.baua.de/dok/8732366)
- 4 U. Rösler, K. Schmidt, M. Merda und M. Melzer, 2018: Digitalisierung in der Pflege. Wie intelligente Technologien die Arbeit professionell Pfleger verändern. Berlin: Initiative Neue Qualität der Arbeit. Available at: [www.inqa.de/DE/Angebote/Publikationen/pflege-4.0.html](http://www.inqa.de/DE/Angebote/Publikationen/pflege-4.0.html)