

# Physically hard work in Germany: still widespread

## 27 baua: Facts

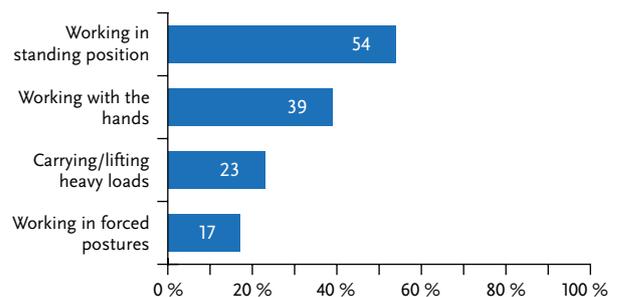
High physical demands such as heavy lifting and carrying are not limited to the production and construction sectors. They can also be found in the service sector, e.g. in nursing and accommodation and food services. Although some aids are now available to facilitate work, not all adverse working conditions can be eliminated. Working under such conditions can be associated with health impairments. On the basis of BIBB/BAuA Employment Survey 2018, this fact sheet shows how often employed persons are exposed to these conditions and how stressful they feel.

### What is physically hard work?

In the current survey, more than 20,000 employees were asked, among other things, about working conditions that require physical effort.

**Table 1** Physical working conditions surveyed in BIBB/BAuA Employment Survey 2018

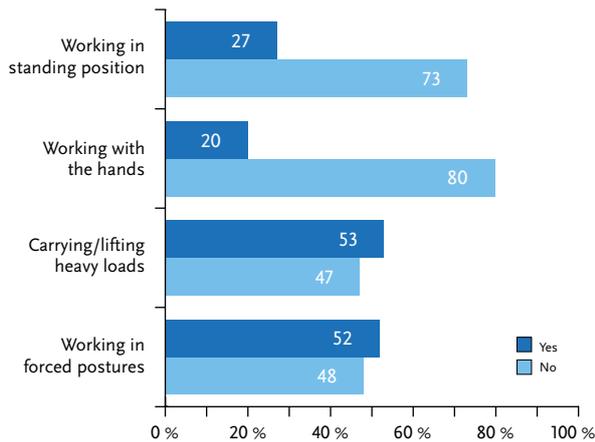
Physical working conditions	Examples of frequently affected professions/occupations:
Working in a standing position	construction, building finishers, gardening, metalworkers incl. welders, restaurant service workers, food preparation
Working with the hands i.e. using the hands to perform work requiring great dexterity, fast sequences of movement or great strength	construction, building finishers, gardening, timber industry, food preparation, personal care
Carrying/lifting heavy loads at least 20 kg for men and at least 10 kg for women	construction, gardening, timber industry, nursing, geriatric care
Working in forced postures i.e. in a bent over, squatting, kneeling position or above one's head	construction, gardening, plumbers/sanitary installations, geriatric care



**Fig. 1** Percentage of employed persons reporting frequent exposure to these working conditions

More than half of the respondents (54%) state that they frequently have to work in a standing position. Slightly fewer respondents (39%) say they frequently have to work with their hands, which requires great dexterity, fast sequences of movement or great strength. About one in four (23%) has to carry or lift heavy loads during work. Frequent work in forced postures, i.e. in bent, squatting, kneeling positions or working above one's head, is reported by 17% of respondents.

Subsequently, respondents were asked whether they perceived frequently working under these conditions as stressful. Figure 2 shows the answers.



**Fig. 2** Answers to the question, "If you are frequently exposed to these working conditions, is it stressful for you?"

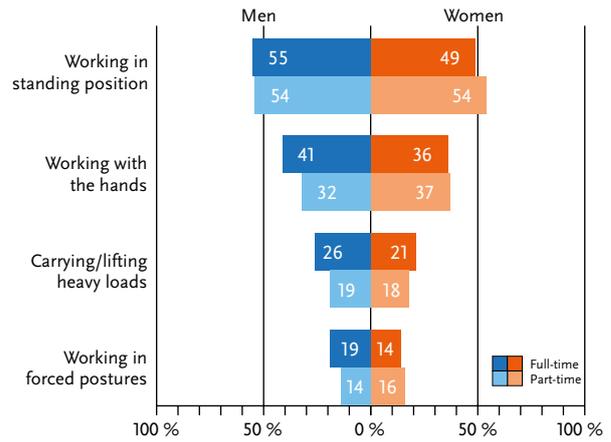
It is striking that not every physically strenuous job is perceived as a burden by everyone. Fortunately, the most frequently mentioned working conditions are perceived as the least stressful: Only about one fourth (27%) say that they perceive frequent standing as a strain, and only one in five (20%) say that they are disturbed by frequently working with their hands. Although the other working conditions are not mentioned as often, they are frequently experienced as a burden by respondents: About one in two who often have to lift and carry heavy loads (53%) or work in a forced posture (52%) perceives this as stressful.

### Has physical strain at work decreased?

According to fact sheet 26 on work intensity, mental stress is at a high level. Does this mean in return that physical strain has decreased? A comparison with BIBB/BAuA Employment survey 2012 shows that physical stress continues to be a current issue. Overall, the results have changed very little: The biggest difference is that slightly fewer respondents reported carrying out work with their hands, which requires great dexterity, fast sequences of movement or great strength (39% vs. 42% in 2012).

### Physically demanding work is not only a male domain

Men and women not only work in different kinds of jobs, they also differ in the number of working hours. Whereas about half the women work part-time, the vast majority of men work full-time. Overall, male full-time workers most often report being physically exposed to hard work. Among women, those who work part-time report a higher proportion of physical work, with shares that are also higher than those of men in part-time work. With respect to part-time and full-time workers, women are more likely than men to assess physically hard work as stressful.



**Fig. 3** Frequency of physical work by weekly working hours and gender

### Conclusion: Tough work, tough workers?

The results of the current BIBB/BAuA survey show that many employees still have to perform physically hard work. However, this is not always accompanied by a feeling of physical strain. Whether something is perceived as stressful or not depends on the type of physical work involved: many of those affected find heavy lifting and carrying as well as working in a forced posture particularly stressful. Special attention should therefore be paid to occupations that involve these types of physical work, especially when multiple types of strain occur in combination.

However, potential health concerns caused by physical work can be counteracted effectively. A health-promoting workplace, e.g. one offering ergonomic designs or providing carry and transport aids, relieves the strain. It is equally important to comply with codes of behaviour, e.g. by using lifting and carrying techniques that protect the back, by deliberately making compensatory movements, and by taking breaks.

### Further Information

- 1 Bundesanstalt für Arbeitsschutz und Arbeitsmedizin, Hrsg., 2011. Stehend K.O.? Wenn Arbeit durchge- standen werden muss. 2. Auflage. Dortmund: BAuA. Verfügbar unter: [www.baua.de/dok/8658186](http://www.baua.de/dok/8658186)
- 2 Bundesanstalt für Arbeitsschutz und Arbeitsmedizin, Hrsg., 2014. Manuelle Arbeit ohne Schaden. Grundsätze und Gefährdungsbeurteilung. 4. Auflage. Dortmund: BAuA. Verfügbar unter: [www.baua.de/dok/8658182](http://www.baua.de/dok/8658182)
- 3 Bundesanstalt für Arbeitsschutz und Arbeitsmedizin, Hrsg., 2011. Heben und Tragen ohne Schaden. 6. Auflage. Dortmund: BAuA. Verfügbar unter: [www.baua.de/dok/8658104](http://www.baua.de/dok/8658104)