

# Working conditions in medical and geriatric care

## Higher demands, more health complaints

### 31 baua: Facts

Professional care work is becoming increasingly important in the context of demographic change. At the same time, many positions are vacant. In the following, the BIBB/BAuA Employee Survey 2018 serves as a basis for examining the work demands, stressors and health complaints of geriatric nurses and hospital nurses. The findings show that nursing professionals are exposed not only to high physical demands at work but also to considerable mental demands. This is also reflected in the perception of stressors and in the health complaints of nursing staff.

Good working conditions can help make nursing professions more attractive and to counter the shortage of staff in the nursing sector. But what characterises the current everyday working conditions of nursing staff? The following analysis considers data on the work demands, stressors and health complaints of geriatric nurses (n = 323) and hospital nurses (n = 618; including health care workers, paediatric nurses, midwives, maternity nurses). These data are compared to the data gathered in other occupational groups (n = 19,015). The assignment to different occupational groups was based on the "Classification of Occupations 2010" of the Federal Employment Agency. Nurses were identified by the classification numbers 81301 to 81323 and 81352 to 81394, as well as 82101 to 82194.

#### Physical demands

Physical demands such as frequently working while standing, lifting and carrying heavy loads and working in forced postures (e.g. bending, squatting, or kneeling) occur significantly more often in nursing professions than in other occupations (Fig. 1).

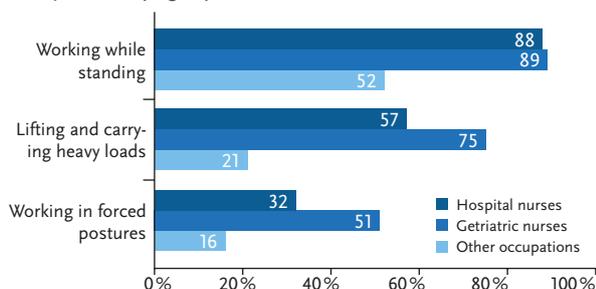
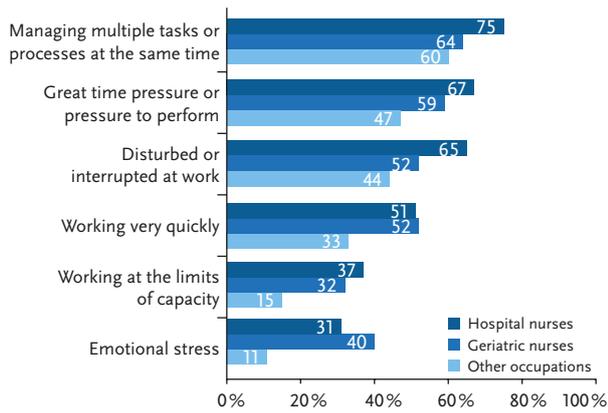


Fig. 1 Frequent physical demands in different occupational groups (in %)

These differences are particularly apparent in the comparison of geriatric nurses and other occupations. The frequent lifting and carrying of heavy loads (75 % vs. 21 %) and working in forced postures (51 % vs. 16 %) occurs here more than three times as often as in other occupations. One of the reasons is the need to move patients on a regular basis.

#### Mental demands

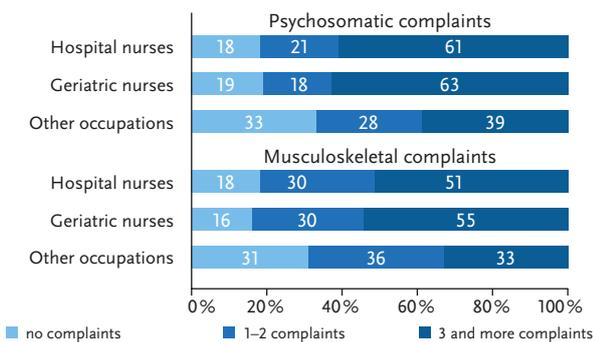
In addition, several mental demands are experienced more frequently by professional caregivers than by representatives of other occupational groups (Fig. 2). Hospital nurses are particularly exposed here. 75 % of them state that they often manage multiple tasks or processes at the same time, compared to 60 % in other occupations. Slightly more than two-thirds of the hospital nurses report that they are often under high pressure to meet deadlines or pressure to perform (67 %) and that they are often disturbed or interrupted at work (65 %). More than half of the hospital nurses report that they often have to work very quickly (51 %). In addition, more than twice as many hospital nurses work at the limit of their capacity (37 % vs. 15 %). These mental demands occur more frequently in geriatric nurses than in other professions. The first mentioned also report that they often have to work quickly (52 %). In addition, they are almost four times more likely than workers in other occupations to find themselves in emotionally stressful situations (40 % vs. 11 %).



**Fig. 2** Frequent mental demands in different occupational groups (in %)

### Overload, stress, and health

Adverse work demands can lead to overload, stress, and health problems. Hospital nurses and geriatric nurses feel overchallenged by their amount of work almost twice as often as other employed persons (45 % and 41 % vs. 21 %). In addition, 61 % of the hospital nurses and 46 % of the geriatric nurses report an increase in stress during the last two years. This is more than reported by employees in other occupations (37 %). Hospital nurses and geriatric nurses also report more psychosomatic and musculoskeletal complaints compared to representatives of other professions (Fig. 3). Whereas more than 60 % of respondents in medical and geriatric care professions report three or more psychosomatic complaints, these complaints are reported by 39 % of the people working in other professions. Three or more musculoskeletal complaints are reported by more than half of the nurses in the medical and geriatric care professions (51 % and 55 %, respectively), but only by one-third of employees in other occupations.



**Fig. 3** Health complaints in different occupational groups (in %)

### Conclusion

Professional care workers are more often exposed to physical and mental stressors than other workers. This is reflected in the data on overload, stress, and health complaints. To meet the existing and growing need for high-quality nursing in Germany, it is thus necessary to focus more on providing a healthy work environment for professional nurses. In its Concerted Action on Nursing the federal government recently developed numerous recommendations for taking action in this area.<sup>1</sup> Some of these relate to the reorganisation of work, which can be undertaken by health care facilities themselves using suitable instruments.<sup>2</sup> Others relate to the utilisation of modern digital technologies, which are currently being tested in a number of projects and programmes.<sup>3</sup> If more attention is paid to human-centered working conditions and a health-promoting work environment, these recommendations can help improve working conditions in the field of professional care.

English translation. German original version available:  
doi: 10.21934/baua:fakten20200108

### Further Information

- 1 J. Spahn, F. Giffey und H. Heil, 2019. Konzertierte Aktion Pflege: Vereinbarungen der Arbeitsgruppen 1 bis 5. Berlin: Bundesministerium für Gesundheit. Available at: [https://www.bundesgesundheitsministerium.de/fileadmin/Dateien/3\\_Downloads/K/Konzertierte\\_Aktion\\_Pflege/KAP\\_Vereinbarungen\\_AG\\_1-5.pdf](https://www.bundesgesundheitsministerium.de/fileadmin/Dateien/3_Downloads/K/Konzertierte_Aktion_Pflege/KAP_Vereinbarungen_AG_1-5.pdf)
- 2 Gute Stationsorganisation. Ein Leitfaden für Pflegeeinrichtungen. 1. Auflage. Dortmund: 2016. Available at: <http://www.baua.de/dok/7075740>
- 3 U. Rösler, K. Schmidt, M. Merda und M. Melzer, 2018. Digitalisierung in der Pflege. Wie intelligente Technologien die Arbeit professionell Pflegenden verändern. Berlin: Initiative Neue Qualität der Arbeit. Available at: [https://inqa.de/SharedDocs/downloads/webshop/pflege-4.0?\\_\\_blob=publicationFile](https://inqa.de/SharedDocs/downloads/webshop/pflege-4.0?__blob=publicationFile)