

Cooking as a career: A passion involving a high level of physical commitment

34 baua: Facts

Successfully completing an apprenticeship as a cook generally requires accuracy, organisational talent, and a good physical constitution. The results of the current 2018 BIBB/BAuA Employment Survey specifically confirm the latter requirement, because professional cooking involves above average physical demands and high-intensity work. Moreover, according to Barmer Ersatzkasse (2017), the sickness rate among cooks (5.7 %) is higher than among other insured individuals (4.8 %).

In 2018, 504,900 cooks were employed in Germany on contracts subject to social insurance contributions in the field of food preparation, corresponding to approx. 1.5 % of employees. They work in various sectors, including restaurants, hotels, canteens, hospitals, and catering companies. This fact sheet reports on the work demands and health complaints of employed cooks (n = 268, KldB 2010, key number 293, food preparation, hereafter referred to as "cooks"). Two-thirds of the cooks surveyed work in the hotel and restaurant industry (n = 182) and thus partly under special working conditions and other stress factors. Such deviating results in the hotel and restaurant sector are shown separately. The results for cooks are compared with the results for other employees ("others", n = 17,584).

Those pursuing cooking as a career are often younger than workers in other occupations. Almost one-third (31 %) of cooks is under 35 years. In the hospitality industry, this age group accounts for of 38 %, compared to only 28 % for other employees. Unlike other occupations, cooking tends to be a somewhat female domain (56 % vs. 46 % others), whereas the hospitality industry generally has a balanced gender ratio (50 %).

High physical demands and high-intensity work

Almost all cooks state that they frequently work in a standing position (99 %), compared to only 54 % of other employees. More than three-quarters of cooks frequently have to perform work with their hands requiring a high degree of skill, fast sequences of movements or greater forces (77 % vs. 38 % others); in the hotel and restaurant industry, that figure is almost 81 %. More than half (56 %) of cooks frequently work with oil, grease or dirt in the hospitality industry, it affects 60 % of cooks – compared to only 17 %

of other employees. More than half frequently work under unfavourable climatic conditions (51 % vs. 20 % others), and compared to other employees, cooks have to lift and carry heavy loads more than twice as often (46 % vs. 22 % others, see Fig. 1).

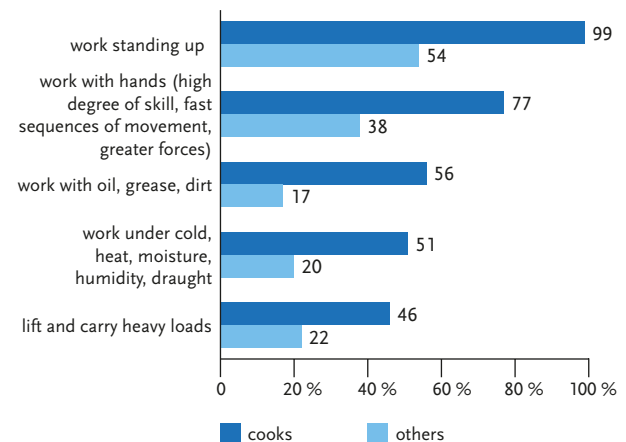


Fig. 1 Proportion employees with frequent physical and environmental demands (%)

The predominant psychological stressors include multitasking, speed, and strong deadline or performance pressure, as well as monotony and performance standards. For example, 71 % of cooks report supervising diverse tasks at the same time; in the hospitality industry, even 76 % say the same (vs. 60 % others). Almost twice as many cooks (65 %) have to work very fast compared to other employees (33 %). Furthermore, 55 %, and as many as 61 % in the hospitality industry, state that they frequently work under strong deadline or performance pressure (vs. 48 % others). 59 % of cooks (61 % in the hospitality industry) report performing repetitive operations frequently (vs. 47 % others).

A prescribed exact number of pieces, a certain minimum output or time to do a certain task is often the case for 50 % of cooks (vs. 29 % others, see Figure 2). In addition, the high demands on cooks are exacerbated by excessively long working hours. Whereas about 12 % of other employees work over 48 hours a week, that rate is 19 % among cooks. In the hotel and restaurant industry, the figure is as high as 27 %.

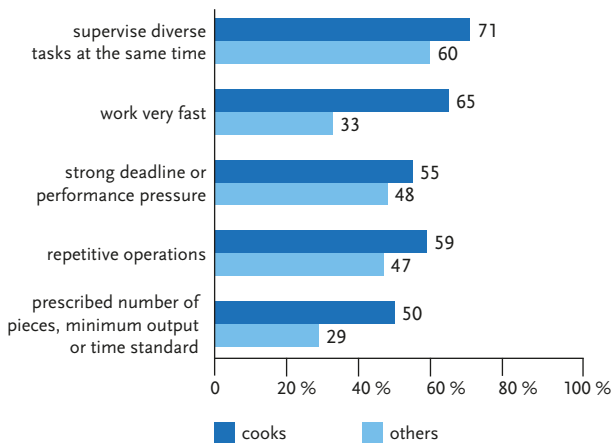


Fig. 2 Proportion of employees with frequent mental workloads (in %)

Little room for job decision latitude but good social support

Resources such as adequate job decision latitude and sufficient social support are important, especially when the demands are high. However, the job decision latitude of cooks with regard to planning and scheduling their own work (frequently: 49 %, vs. 64 % others) and deciding independently when to take a break (frequently: 43 %, vs. 62 % others) is comparatively low. Yet, the proportion of cooks who can frequently influence the amount of work is 27 %, which is almost equal to that of other employees (29 %).

The situation is better when it comes to social support: 76 % of cooks frequently receive help and support from their colleagues. In addition, 57 % of them frequently receive support from their superiors. This puts cooks on an equal level with other employees (79 % by colleagues, 59 % by superiors). Compared to other employees, however, cooks more frequently receive praise and recognition from direct superiors (40 % vs. 32 % others).

Frequent physical exhaustion and complaints

More than three-quarters of cooks (82 %) have musculo-skeletal problems. They are therefore much more likely to be affected than other employees (51 %).

In addition, cooks more frequently report being physically exhausted (47 % vs. 37 % others). Cooks rate their state of

health significantly worse than other employees do. About one-quarter of cooks (26 %) report an inferior or poor state of health, compared to only 15 % of the other employees (see Figure 3).

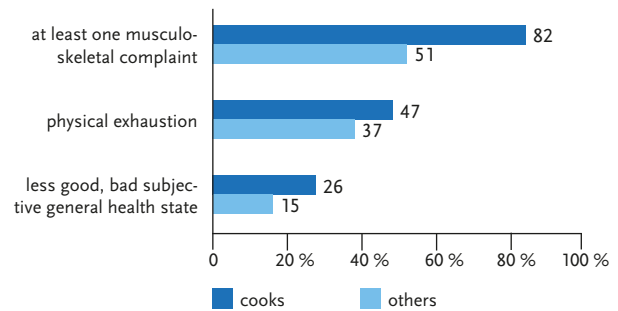


Fig. 3 Proportion of employees with strain consequences (in %)

Conclusion

As the results show, the occupation of chef is associated with excessive working hours, frequent physical and psychological demands, and relatively little job decision latitude. These stressful working conditions are likely to make it difficult for employers to attract new apprentices to a cooking career. Employers should therefore commit themselves to a healthy work environment and adapt working conditions and working climate to current rules and ergonomic findings. The legally required risk assessment, which has to be performed in every professional kitchen, is suitable for this purpose. Whether small restaurant or canteen kitchen, whether junior or experienced professional, all those involved benefit from careful risk assessment and the resulting measures to protect the health of cooks.

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Further information

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- 2 Leitung des GDA-Arbeitsprogramms Psyche (Hrsg.), 2017. Empfehlungen zur Umsetzung der Gefährdungsbeurteilung psychischer Belastung. Berlin. Available at: www.gda-psyche.de/SharedDocs/Publikationen/DE/broschuere-empfehlung-gefaehrungsbeurteilung.pdf