

Can You Take It? Physically Hard Work still in the News

The BIBB/BAuA Employment Survey in 2006 showed that strenuous physical demands like heavy lifting and carrying can be found not only in production and the building sector, but also in the services industry (e.g. nursing). Although there are now many tools available for facilitating work (e.g. load carrying equipment) not all “heavy” working conditions can be eliminated. Work under such conditions can be accompanied by impairments to health. This fact sheet shows how often employees are exposed to such conditions and how far this is physically demanding for them. Findings of the current BIBB/BAuA Employment Survey 2012 are shown.

What is covered by physically hard work?

In the current survey, over 20,000 people in dependent employment were polled among other things on working conditions that necessitate physical effort. The following conditions were inquired about:

Physical working condition	Encountered frequently for example in
Working while standing	Catering, trading, craft sector
Working with the hands i.e. using the hands with high precision, fast motions or with greater strength	Construction, craft sector
Carrying/lifting heavy loads i.e. at least 20 kg for men and 10 kg for women	Construction, nursing, waste disposal
Working in forced posture i.e. in a bent, kneeling or lying posture or working overhead	Gardening, electrical engineering
Working exposed to heavy reverberations and vibrations	Construction, crane operators

First of all employees were asked whether the corresponding working conditions were encountered frequently, sometimes, rarely or never. The following graph shows how many of those polled answered “frequently”.

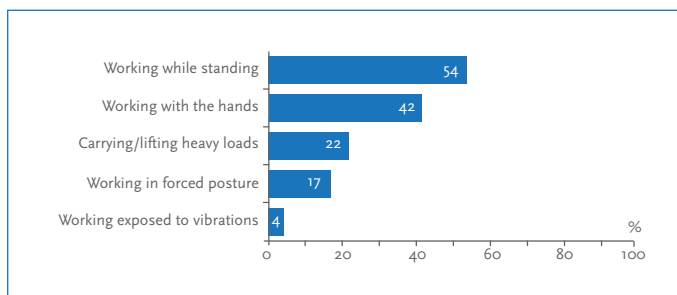


Fig. 1: Percentage of employees who state that they are frequently exposed to these working conditions

Over half of those polled (54%) state that they frequently have to work while standing. Slightly fewer (42%) say that they frequently carry out work with their hands that demands high precision, fast movements or greater strength. About one in four (22%) have to carry or lift heavy loads at work. Having to work frequently in a forced posture (i.e. in a bent, kneeling or lying posture or working overhead) was claimed by 17%, while working exposed to heavy reverberations or vibrations is encountered only rarely (4%).

Furthermore, participants were asked whether working frequently under these conditions is perceived as stressful. The following graph shows the responses:

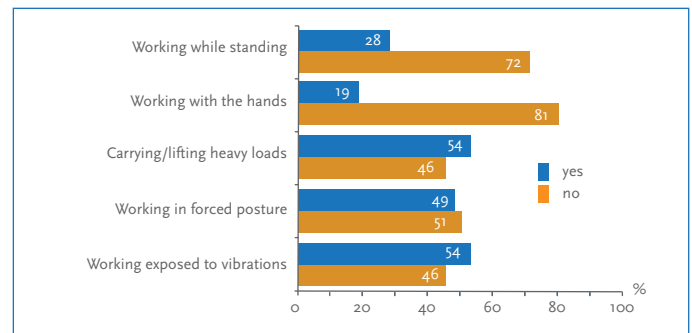


Fig. 2: If you are exposed frequently to these working conditions, is this stressful for you?

As can be seen, not everybody regards all physically strenuous work as stressful. Fortunately, the working conditions that are mentioned the most frequently are those that are regarded as the least stressful: only about one third (28%) say that they perceive frequent working while standing as stressful and only one in five (19%) are bothered by having to work frequently with their hands. The other working conditions are not mentioned as frequently, but are frequently stressful for those polled: roughly every second person, who often has to lift and carry heavy loads (54%), works exposed to reverberations and

vibrations (54%) or in a forced posture (49%), regards this as stressful.

Has physical stresses been reduced?

As can be read in the first factsheet on the intensity of work, mental stress is at a very high level. But did physical stress decrease in return? A comparison of the BIBB/BAuA surveys in 2006 and 2012 shows that physical stress is still topical. Overall the findings have hardly changed: standing, lifting and carrying heavy loads and working exposed to reverberations are indicated less often. However, forced postures are indicated slightly more frequently than six years ago. The question regarding working with the hands was new, so that a comparison is not possible.

Physically hard work does not apply only to men

Men and women do not only carry out different professions, they also differ with regard to working hours. Half of the women work part-time, whereas the clear majority of men work full-time. The graph shows that overall full-time working men are most likely exposed to physically hard work. On average, they state slightly more frequently than women in full-time employment that they carry out physically strenuous work. When comparing women and men in part-time employment, women indicate physical work slightly more frequently than men. Women stated more frequently than men that they perceive physically hard work as stressful, regardless of whether they were in full-time or part-time employment.

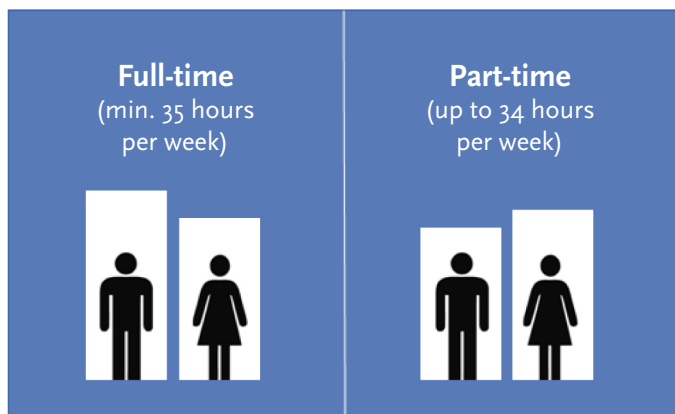
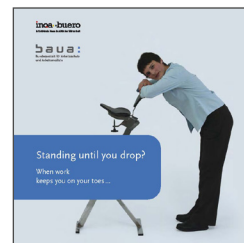


Fig. 3: Frequent physical work dependent on weekly working hours and gender

Summary: can you take it?

The findings of the latest BIBB/BAuA Employment Survey show that many employees still have to carry out physically demanding work, but that this is not always accompanied by a feeling of stress. Whether something is experienced as stressful depends on the type of physical work: above all lifting and carrying heavy loads and work exposed to reverberations and in forced postures are frequently regarded as stressful. Special attention should be paid to occupations in which this type of physical work is found, in particular where several stress factors appear in combination. This affects above all construction work and building trades (e.g. tilers, roofers), painters and decorators. However, possible health complaints caused by physical work can be effectively countered by health-promoting *work design* (e.g. ergonomic design of the workplace, provision of carrying and transporting tools, vibration insulation for machinery) and by compliance with *codes of behaviour* (e.g. lifting and carrying techniques that protect the back, deliberate compensatory movements, taking breaks).

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www.inqa.de/DE/Angebote/Publikationen/engl-ergonomic-workplace.html

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