

Working conditions in temporary employment

Temporary employment, part-time employment, marginal employment, fixed-term employment – these so-called atypical forms of employment have been increased since the 1990s. The report “Safety and health at work 2012“ shows that in Germany one in five persons are in employment arrangements of this kind. Often, one person displays several of these “atypical“ characteristics, for example, he or she is employed on a marginal and a fixed-term basis. This factsheet focusses on temporary workers. Using the data from the BIBB/BAuA 2012 Employment Survey, the working conditions to which temporary workers are exposed and the state of their health is shown.

Who are temporary workers?

A temporary worker is employed by one employer (the agency) but works for another employer (hirer). In 2012 there were around 880,000 temporary workers in Germany. These persons are mainly male (71%), but the proportion of women has steadily increased over the years. The majority of women employed by employment agencies are found in the services sector, a considerable number of the men are found in production. In addition, temporary workers are slightly younger than employees not employed by agencies.

Physically demanding (temporary) work

In the BIBB/BAuA Employment Survey, 479 temporary workers provided information among other things on their working conditions and their health. Below, these assessments will be compared with the assessments of those in dependent employment who are not employed by agencies.

On the question as to how often the corresponding working condition is found, Fig. 1 shows how many of those surveyed answered with “Frequently“.

In comparison with those who are not employed by agencies, temporary workers reported more frequently that they were exposed to hard physical work and unfavourable environmental conditions: for example, almost three quarters of temporary workers (72%) said that they frequently had to work while standing; only 55% of those not employed by agencies claimed this.

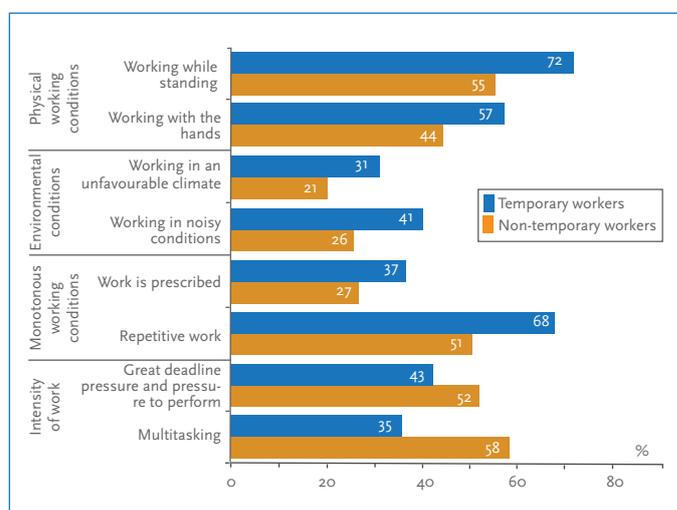


Fig. 1 Percentage of temporary workers who state that they are exposed frequently to these working conditions in comparison with employees not employed by agencies.

Frequent work in an unfavourable climate (cold, hot, wet, damp, draughty) was reported by about one in three temporary workers (31%) but only one in five non-agency workers (21%). Monotony is also found more frequently in temporary work: about two thirds of the temporary workers (68%) said that their work was frequently repetitive. Of those not employed by agencies, only half (51%) confirmed this statement. The intensity of work comprises working conditions that are to a great extent mentally demanding. The intensity of work shows the reverse picture: greater proportions of those who are not temporary workers stated that they were exposed to working under pressure (52%

as against 43% of temporary workers) or frequently had to keep an eye on different tasks at the same time (multitasking) (58% as against 35% of temporary workers).

In addition, temporary workers reported that they had less decision latitude and a greater lack of control than employees not employed by agencies: about 29% of the temporary workers stated that they could never plan and arrange their work themselves. Only 7% of non-agency workers said this. While 15% of the temporary workers often did not receive sufficient information to carry out their tasks, this figure was 9% in the reference group.

How about the state of health of temporary workers?

The following figure shows the answers. People were asked whether various psychosomatic and musculo-skeletal complaints had occurred in the previous year. Psychosomatic complaints include, for example, nervousness, irritability and exhaustion, musculo-skeletal complaints include backache and pains in the back of the neck, arms and legs.

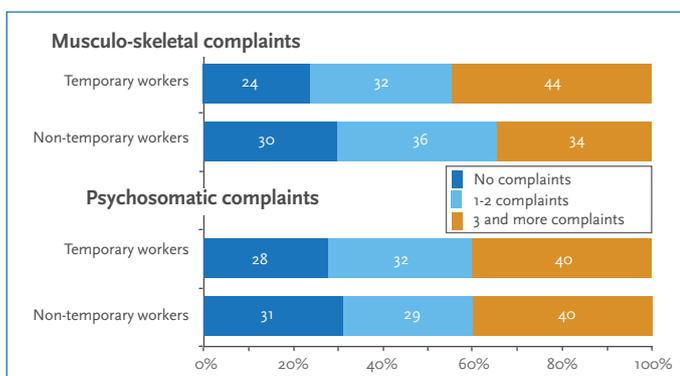


Fig. 2: Percentage of temporary workers claiming health complaints in comparison to non-temporary workers

Concerning the musculo-skeletal complaints temporary workers differ clearly from non-temporary workers: 24% of the temporary workers said that they had not suffered any pain in the musculo-skeletal area last year. In the reference group, 30% were free of pain. However, the majority of temporary workers (44%) reported three and more musculo-skeletal complaints; this was 10% more than in the reference group (34%). There

are no clear differences between the two groups with regard to psychosomatic complaints: not quite one third of those surveyed reported that they had no complaints (28% of the temporary workers, 31% of the reference group). On the other hand, four out of ten of those surveyed stated that they had at least three psychosomatic symptoms (40% in each case).

Organising temporary work

The findings of the latest BIBB/BAuA survey show that, in comparison, the work of temporary workers is more frequently physically demanding and monotonous, and often takes place in unfavourable environmental conditions. This also has to do with the main area for temporary work, namely production and services. These great physical and monotonous demands are also accompanied by more physical complaints: temporary workers report more frequently that they have backache and pains in the back of the neck, legs and arms – and this is in spite of their, on average, young age. For this reason, it is important to counteract these complaints by means of health-promoting work planning and compliance with health-friendly rules of behaviour. You can find information on this in Factsheet 2 (www.baua.de/dok/6506796).

Other possibilities for dealing positively with these working conditions are found where employees can have an effect on their work and are well integrated in the information process. However, the temporary workers who were surveyed stated more frequently than the reference group that they did not have these opportunities. For this reason, it is particularly important to ensure a good integration of temporary workers in the hiring company and to make the greatest possible decision latitude available to them comparable to that of the core workforce.

Would you like to know more about this?

You can find more information in two projects that are advised and supported by the BAuA: the result of the GRAzil project is a toolbox that makes useful instruments and practical examples available for planning temporary work at the hiring company. The GEZA project is involved specifically with health management in temporary employment agencies and provides aid for action and decision making. You can find all the information on this here: www.baua.de/dok/680344

Source: www.baua.de/dok/6506798

Revised: January 2014

Federal Institute for Occupational Safety and Health
Friedrich-Henkel-Weg 1-25
44149 Dortmund, Germany

Service telephone +49 231 9071-2071
Fax +49 231 9071-2070
info-zentrum@baua.bund.de
www.baua.de