

Employing 3.5 million people (Federal Statistical Office, 2012), the retail sector is one of Germany's economic sectors with the largest workforce and has experienced a multitude of changes over the last few years. At the same time, changes have occurred not only in the retail landscape itself – as a result of the growing number of discounters and specialist chains – but also in the framework conditions for employment. For example, extended shop opening hours have led to an increase in atypical working hours. Based on the BIBB/BAuA 2012 Employment Survey, this factsheet describes physical and mental working conditions, resources and health disturbances commonly experienced by employees in foodstuffs, drinks and tobacco retail, in other parts of the retail sector, and in other sectors.

Of more than 17,000 employees who participated in the BIBB/BAuA 2012 survey, almost 1,250 work in the retail sector. The occupations stated by employees in the retail sector range from pharmacy assistants to carpenters. A large proportion of the retail sector is comprised of salespeople in supermarkets and grocery stores (subsequently referred to as foodstuffs, drinks and tobacco retail). These include: sales personnel and sales assistants for foodstuffs, drinks and tobacco; sales personnel for baked goods, confectionery, meat and sausages; sales personnel in buffets and canteens; and retailers in the foodstuffs, drinks and tobacco sector (181 employees). In this factsheet, persons employed in foodstuffs, drinks and tobacco sales are considered separately and then also compared not only with all other retail workers (subsequently referred to as other retail, albeit only if information on occupation was available; 1,066 workers) but also with other sectors (15,645 workers).

Retail is a female sector

Whereas women account for around 44% of workers in other sectors, this rises to 68% in other retail and 87% in foodstuffs, drinks and tobacco sales. The high proportion of women is also reflected in the share of part-time workers (under 35 hours of work a week): in foodstuffs, drinks and tobacco sales, 64% of employees are part-time, compared to 46% for other retail and 21% in all other sectors.

Working when others are already at home

Not least because of extended shop opening hours, the proportion of people working in foodstuffs, drinks and tobacco sales outside of normal working hours (between 7 am and 7 pm) is greater (36%) than in other retail (21%)

and in other sectors (22%). Workers in this sector also have to work more often on Saturdays (foodstuffs, drinks and tobacco sales 95%, other retail 78%, other sectors 63%).

Heavy demand on a daily basis

Work in other retail is particularly characterised (see Fig. 1) by frequent work while standing (70%), working with the hands (great strength/great dexterity/fast sequence: 42%), lifting and carrying heavy loads (25%), and frequent unfavourable climatic conditions in the working environment (cold, heat, wetness, humidity, draught: 16%). In foodstuffs, drinks and tobacco sales, the physical requirements are even higher: 85% report frequently working while standing, 60% frequently working with the hands, 49% frequently lifting and carrying heavy loads, and 33% frequently being exposed to unfavourable climatic conditions in the working environment. Compared with other retail, employees in other sectors report requirements such as working while standing

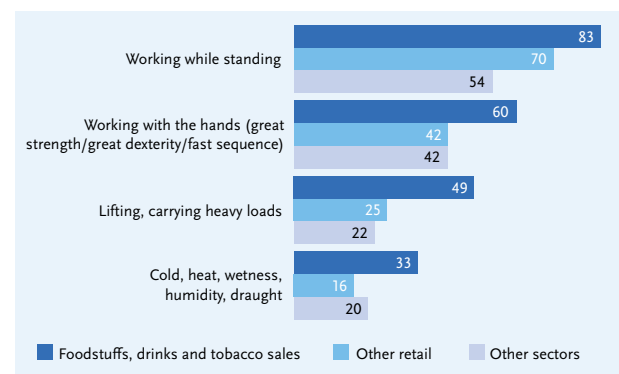


Fig. 1: Comparison of frequent physical demands of employees (in %)

less often (54%), lifting and carrying heavy loads less often (22%), working with the hands as often (42%), and unfavourable climatic conditions in the working environment more often (20%).

Fast and monotonous work

Compared with the other sectors, both other retail and foodstuffs, drinks and tobacco sales report a greater frequency of mental demands (see Fig. 2) as a result of constantly recurring work processes (48% vs. 61% vs. 68%) and working very quickly (38% vs. 44% vs. 58%).

On the other hand, frequently having to supervise different tasks (other retail 52%; foodstuffs, drinks and tobacco sales 47%) and great time pressure or pressure to perform (other retail 39%; foodstuffs, drinks and tobacco sales 32%) are mentioned less often than in other sectors (59% and 53%).



Fig. 2: Comparison of frequent mental demands of employees (in %)

Social support and latitude for action

Frequent social resources such as a sense of community, positive cooperation and support from colleagues – that is, aspects relating to social support – are reported by around 80% or more of respondents across the board, without substantial differences between the comparison groups; with regard to frequent support by their superior, this figure lies at around 60%. The situation is different when it comes to latitude for action: only 44% of respondents in foodstuffs, drink and tobacco sales report frequently being able to plan and arrange their own work, compared to 55% in other retail and 69% in other sectors.

Health disturbances

The frequency of psychosomatic complaints, such as exhaustion or nervousness, barely differs between the three groups, with 51% to 52% of respondents reporting two or more frequently occurring complaints (see Fig. 3). On the other hand, clear deviations were observed with regard to musculo-skeletal complaints, e.g. pain in the back, legs or hands, which were reported considerably more often:

outside of retail, 50% of employees report two or more frequently occurring musculo-skeletal complaints in connection with work, compared with 57% in other retail and even 64% in foodstuffs, drinks and tobacco sales.

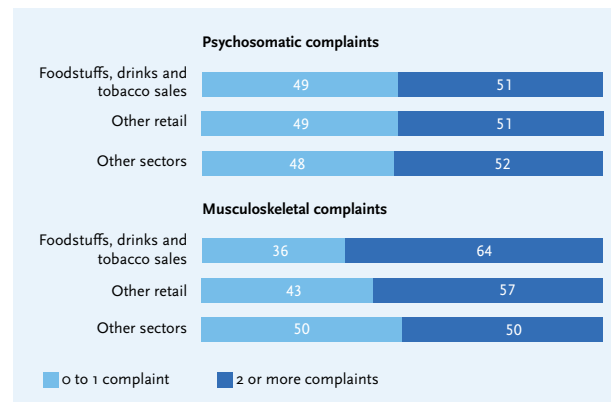


Fig. 3: Comparison of number of health disturbances in employees (in %)

Summary

Retail is not simply retail. Sector-specific characteristics aside, working conditions were found to vary widely even within this sector. At the same time, employees in foodstuffs, drinks and tobacco sales, in particular, are subject to greater stress than those in other areas of retail. Their work is characterised by high physical demands, such as working at a high speed while standing, in conjunction with an increased number of musculo-skeletal complaints. It is therefore even more important to implement sustainable prevention concepts. These include not only behavioural prevention concepts relating to the ergonomic design of service counters and points of sale, for example, but also behavioural prevention measures relating to topics such as “lifting and carrying”. Performing the legally required risk assessment (section 5 of the Occupational Safety and Health Act) makes it easier to identify areas of action. Preventive action is more likely to become established in the long term if the risk assessment is carried out regularly and repeatedly, if managerial staff are involved in the process, and if measures are taken to motivate employees.

Would you like to find out more?

“Belastungen des Muskel-Skelett-Systems bei der Arbeit – integrative Präventionsansätze praktisch umsetzen” (www.baua.de/dok/680346)

“Stressreport Deutschland 2012” (www.baua.de/dok/3430796)

“Im Takt? – Gestaltung von flexiblen Arbeitszeitmodellen” (www.baua.de/dok/697378)