

Working conditions of employees with and without disabilities: Similarities and differences

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So far, little is known about the working conditions of employees with disabilities. Analyses of the 2018 BIBB/BAuA Employment Survey comparing employees with and without officially registered disabilities illustrate the importance of looking at working conditions and perceived stress: results show that perceived stress tends to be higher for employees with disabilities compared to those without disabilities.

Which working conditions are considered?

This article looks at psychological work demands, such as pressure to meet dead-lines or fast-paced work and the resulting stress. Respondents could indicate being exposed to a work demand “frequently”, “sometimes”, “rarely”, or “never”. If they stated “frequently”, they were also asked whether they felt stressed by the work demand.

Who works where?

In the 2018 BIBB/BAuA Employment Survey, more than 17,000 employees were surveyed, including 1,766 persons with an officially registered disability. Comparing occupations in terms of skill levels, employees with disabilities are more likely to work in helper and semi-skilled jobs (14 % vs. 8 %) or skilled jobs (62 % vs. 55 %) than those without disability. Conversely, employees with disabilities less frequently work in complex specialist jobs (13 % vs. 17 %) and highly complex jobs (12 % vs. 21 %).

Considering individual sectors, the data show that proportionately more employees with disabilities work in the public sector (32 % vs. 27 %). Interestingly, the proportions between employees with disabilities and without disabilities are almost balanced in the other sectors, such as the industrial (21 % vs. 23 %), handcraft (10 % vs. 11 %), and service (28 % vs. 30 %) sectors. Similarly, previous publications report a higher proportion of employees with disabilities in the public sector¹. Companies with 20 or more employees are obliged to fill at least 5 % of their jobs with severely disabled persons. On average, public employers exceed this quota, whereas private employers on average remain below this threshold.²

Mental work demands

Figure 1 shows that employees with disabilities more often work at their capacity limit, whereas employees without disabilities more frequently experience multitasking.

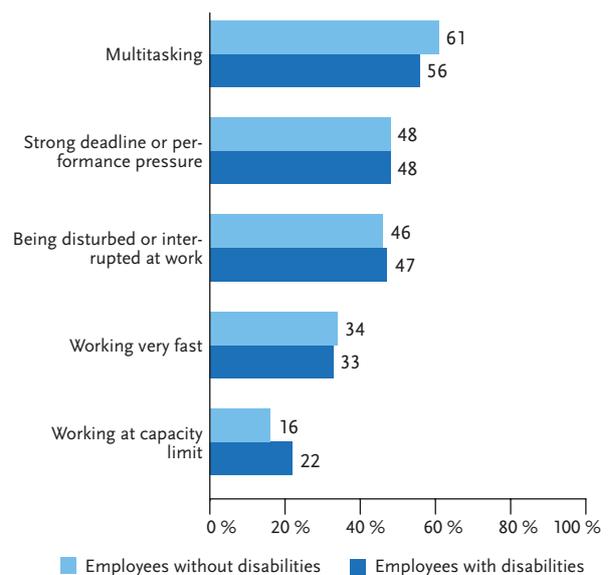


Fig. 1: Frequent work demands of dependent employees with and without disabilities (in %).

This pattern is valid across sectors (i.e. industrial, handcraft, and services). Furthermore, service employees with disabilities more often experience deadline or performance pressure (54 % vs. 47 %) and disturbances/interruptions (53 % vs. 47 %) at work than those without disabilities. In the other sectors, only very small differences emerge. Public sector employees with disabilities more frequently

report fast-paced working requirements than those without disabilities (36 % vs. 30 %). In the industrial sector, however, that trend is slightly reversed (30 % vs. 34 %).

Who feels stress?

Employees with disabilities report higher levels of stress across all examined work demands (see Figure 2). The greatest differences between employees with and without disabilities concern fast-paced working requirements (61 % vs. 51 %) and working at the capacity limit (88 % vs. 78 %). This pattern is also found within individual sectors. The biggest differences between employees with and without disabilities are apparent in the industrial sector, where 69 % of disabled employees feel stressed by fast-paced working requirements (vs. 50 % of non-disabled employees). When it comes to working at one's capacity limit, the greatest difference emerges in the service sector, where 92 % of employees with disabilities and 76 % of those without disabilities feel stressed by this work demand.

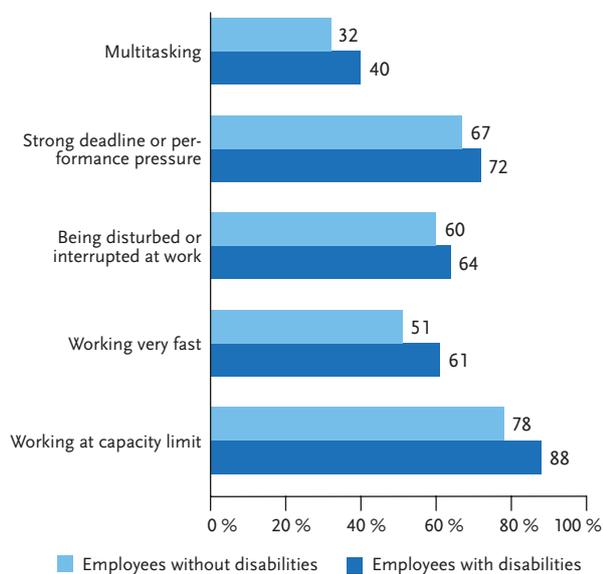


Fig. 2: Perceived stress due to frequently occurring demands among dependent employees with and without disabilities (in %).

Counteracting burdens across the board

Article 27 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities states that persons with disabilities are entitled to favorable and safe working conditions³. However, the fact that employees with disabilities feel more stressed across all investigated work demands than employees without disabilities points to an imbalance. Thus, preventive measures targeting good working conditions are useful to keep employees from being stressed. For example, organizations can support employees with disabilities through workplace adjustments such as better technical equipment or greater flexibility. Furthermore, a work environment experienced as inclusive plays an important role⁴. The examination of individual sectors also shows that the problem is rather widespread. The perceived work stress of employees with disabilities, therefore, is not a marginal issue but one that requires action.

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Further information

- 1 Bundesagentur für Arbeit (2021). Berichte: Blickpunkt Arbeitsmarkt – Arbeitsmarkt-situation schwerbehinderter Menschen 2020. Nürnberg: BA.
- 2 Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Soziales (2021). Dritter Teilhabebericht der Bundesregierung über die Lebenslagen von Menschen mit Beeinträchtigungen. Berlin: BMAS.
- 3 Beauftragter der Bundesregierung für die Belange von Menschen mit Behinderungen (Ed.): Die UN-Behindertenrechtskonvention. Übereinkommen über die Rechte von Menschen mit Behinderungen. Die amtliche, gemeinsame Übersetzung von Deutschland, Österreich, Schweiz und Lichtenstein. Last update: November 2018
- 4 Decker, M., Flüter-Hoffmann, C., & Stettes, O. (2021). Erfolgsfaktoren betrieblicher Inklusion. Empirische Evidenz aus REHADAT-Befragungen von Menschen mit Behinderungen. IW-Trends, 48(2), 105–120.

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