



The Danish working environment during economic growth (2005–2008)

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This report is available in electronic format only.

Supplementing the Danish National Working Conditions Survey (DWECS), the Danish National Working Environment Survey (DANES) makes it possible to assess changes in the Danish working environment between 2005 and 2008. The main findings of DANES 2008 highlight a continuation of trends identified in 2005: demands in the psychosocial working environment increased even further while positive factors increasing the health and well-being of employees became more prevalent in the working environment. Moreover, DANES identified a somewhat surprising increase in physical activity of employees between 2005 and 2008

About the study

The 2008 version of the Danish National Working Environment Survey (DANES) ([NAT \(in Danish\)](#)) was conducted by the National Research Centre for the Working Environment ([NFA](#)) just before the economic downturn began to take its toll in Denmark.

DANES 2008 was undertaken to supplement the findings of the Danish Work Environment Cohort Study (DWECS), the main [national survey](#) on the [working environment](#), to identify important trends and changes in the working environment in the period between the 2005 ([DK0701019D](#)) and 2010 waves of DWECS.

Methodology and content

The results presented in this survey data report rely on two different representative samples of Danish employees aged 18–54 reporting on the working environment in 2005 (DWECS) and 2008 (DANES).

DANES was designed as a [cross-sectional study](#) bearing resemblance to DWECS in order to make comparisons and to identify trends in the working environment from 2005 to 2008 possible. Thus, the DANES 2008 questionnaire incorporates selected items from the DWECS 2005 questionnaire. This is the aspect of DANES 2008 reported on in this survey data report. However, DANES was also designed to test new methods and to include new topics potentially relevant to future rounds of DWECS and other NFA surveys.

The overall picture arising from DANES 2008 is that of a continuation of the main trends identified by DWECS from 2000 ([DK0312SR01](#)) to 2005 ([DK0701019D](#)). However, DANES 2008 also offers some interesting new findings.

Stability and change in patterns of employment

Previous research has demonstrated a link between the type of qualifications required in the job (socioeconomic status) and working environment outcomes ([DK0907059I](#)). Therefore, DANES 2008 also looked into trends in the socioeconomic status of employees from 2005 to 2008.

Overall, no major shift in the socioeconomic status of employees occurred between 2005 and 2008 (Figure 1). Among young workers, there was a shift towards relatively greater representation in low-skill clerical, sales and service occupations and a decrease in unskilled occupations.

Figure 1: Socioeconomic status of employees, 2005–2008

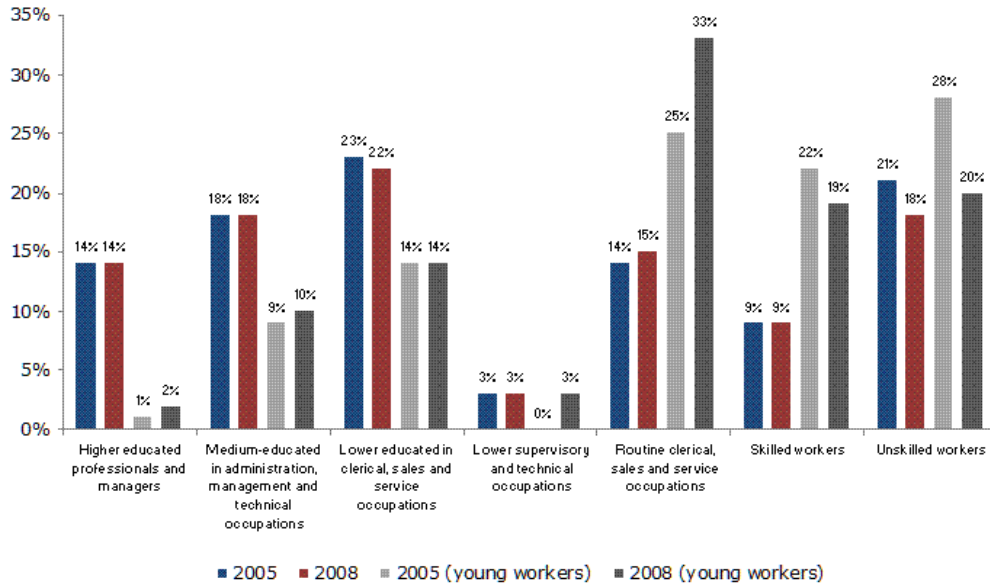


Figure 1: Socioeconomic status of employees, 2005–2008

Notes: Total results in blue and red for 2005 and 2008 respectively. Results for young workers (18–24) in grey shades.

Source: Bue Bjørner et al (2010)

The overall stability in the socioeconomic status of employees is reflected in the relatively low level of **fixed-term work** in 2008 (Figure 2). Only 6% of employees in the DANES survey are engaged in temporary employment.

This finding from DANES apparently contradicts the finding of the national Labour Force Survey (LFS) carried out by [Statistics Denmark](#) that around 9% of workers are engaged in temporary employment. The difference is explained through the fact that the LFS includes 15–18 year olds whereas the youngest employees participating in DANES are 18 years' old and fixed-term work is generally more prevalent among 15–18 year olds.

Figure 2: Types of employment contracts, 2008

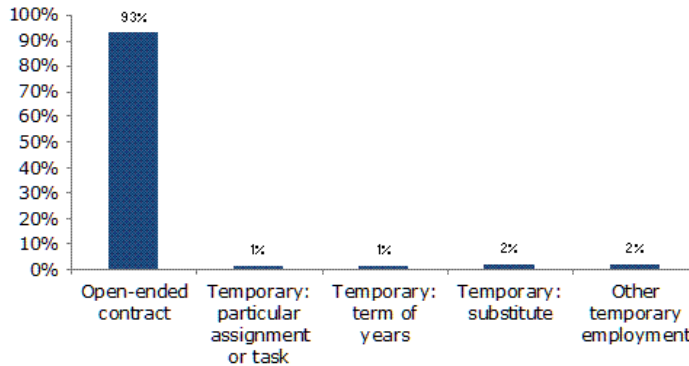


Figure 2: Types of employment contracts, 2008

Source: Bue Bjørner et al (2010)

The average time in the same job decreased from 2005 to 2008, showing a marked decline of seniority ratings (Figure 3). More employees spent, on average, one to two years in their jobs, while the number of those with three or more years of seniority decreased. This trend is likely to reflect the improved labour market situation during the prosperous years from 2005 to 2008 when employees showed greater proclivity to move in search of better job opportunities. A reversal is expected after 2009. Overall, average seniority fell from 8.9 years in 2005 to 8.6 years in 2008.

Figure 3: Seniority, 2005–2008

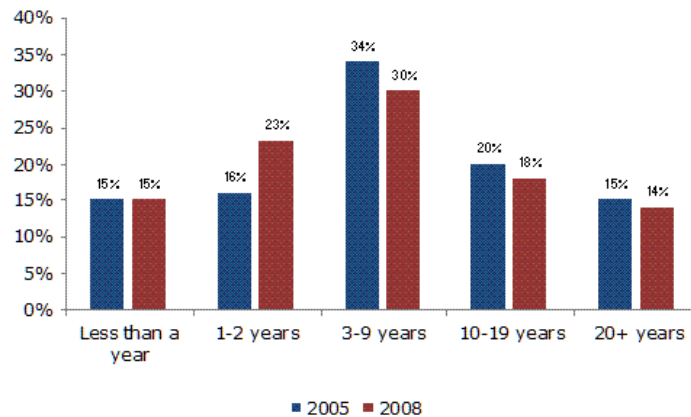


Figure 3: Seniority, 2005–2008

Source: Bue Bjørner et al (2010)

Flexibility regarding time and place of work

The incidence of [homeworking](#) increased between 2005 and 2008 (Figure 4), although this increase is mostly due to more employees working at home ‘seldom/very little’ or a quarter of their working time.

In contrast to LFS results focusing on the fact that significantly more employees work at home ([Flere arbejder hjemme \(in Danish\)](#)), DANES reveals that most employees never work from

home, and that those who do are most likely to do so for less than a quarter of their total working time.

Figure 4: Homeworking, 2005–2008

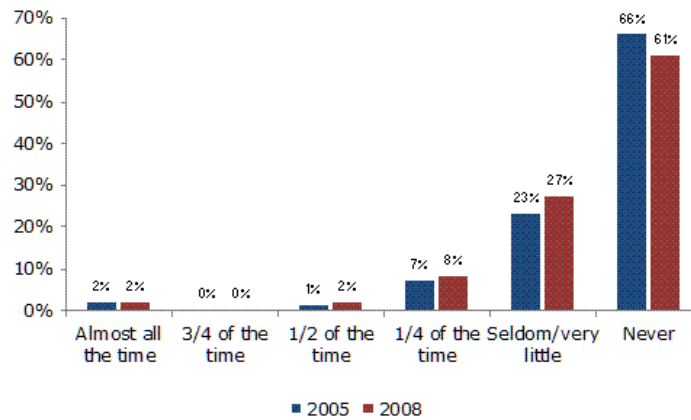


Figure 4: Homeworking, 2005–2008

Source: Bue Bjørner et al (2010)

In terms of working time arrangements, 83% of respondents in DANES report a standard schedule in the interval between 06.00 and 18.00 (Figure 5). Some 4% work in the evening or at night on a permanent basis and 11% have shifting working times. Thus, a total of 17% of employees work non-standard hours on the basis of the provisions laid down in collective agreements and terms of employment.

Figure 5: Working time arrangements, 2008

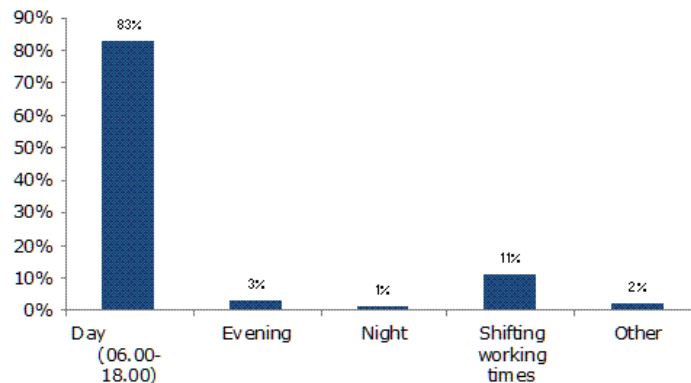


Figure 5: Working time arrangements, 2008

Source: Bue Bjørner et al (2010)

However, this does not imply that other employees always work standard hours. Asked during what time period they actually performed their tasks, 77% of employees said that they ‘never’ undertake work in the interval 24.00 to 04.00, and 16% ‘seldom’ perform work in this interval (Figure 6).

As 17% have non-standard hours as their 'standard' (Figure 5) and 23% of employees face conditions that may imply working between 24.00 and 04.00 (from 'seldom' to 'every day'), a smaller share of employees are sometimes (although 'seldom') required to work at night despite the fact that they occupy positions defined by standard hours (that is, 06.00–18.00).

Figure 6: Working between 24.00 and 04.00, 2008

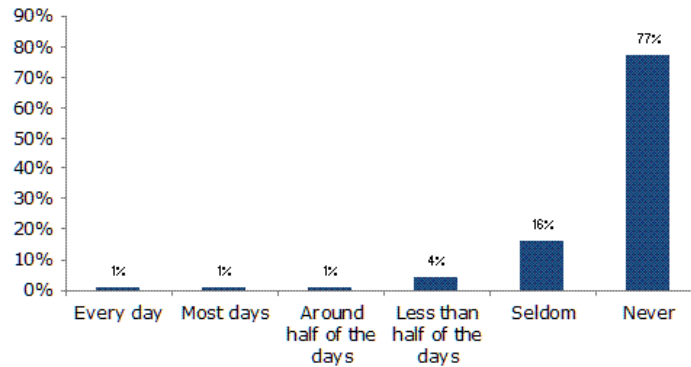


Figure 6: Working between 24.00 and 04.00, 2008

Source: Bue Bjørner et al (2010)

Prevalence of psychosocial demands and positive work factors

Workload

Noticeably, the increase in workload evident from 2000 to 2005 in DWECS 2005 had not levelled out by 2008. On the contrary, the workload assigned to employees increased even further (Figure 7). From 2005 to 2008, the share reporting having no or little difficulties in getting through their assignments at work dropped from 54% to 47%. Conversely, approximately 52% of these respondents were 'sometimes', 'often' or 'always' unable to get all tasks done within the regular working time in 2008, while in 2005 only 46% reported such difficulties. In other words, by 2008 more than half of all employees faced relatively high quantitative demands.

Figure 7: Workload, 2005–2008

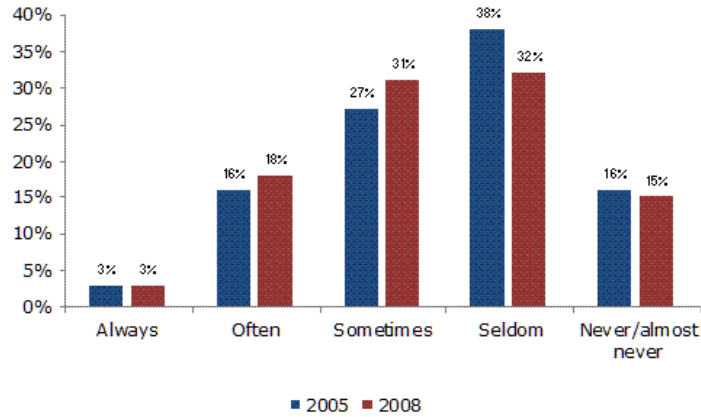


Figure 7: Workload, 2005–2008

Notes: Self-reports on the question: ‘How often do you not have time to complete all your work tasks?’

Source: Bue Bjørner et al (2010)

Pace of work

However, the picture is more ambiguous with regard to the pace of work (Figure 8). A few more employees in 2008 felt that they ‘always’ work at a very high pace and more employees than in 2005 said they ‘sometimes’ do, but fewer respondents said this was ‘often’ the case. In addition, there was a slight decline in the number of respondents who ‘seldom’ or ‘never’ experienced a high pace of work. Overall, the pace of work remained at the same level from 2005 to 2008.

Figure 8: Pace of work, 2005–2008

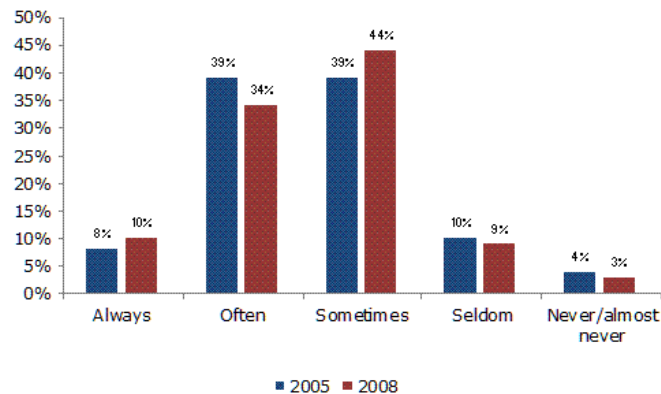


Figure 8: Pace of work, 2005–2008

Notes: Self-reports on the question: ‘Do you have to work very fast?’

Source: Bue Bjørner et al (2010)

Emotional demands

Furthermore, there was an overall increase from 2005 to 2008 in the share of employees experiencing being put in emotionally disturbing situations in the job (Figure 9). Results from DANES 2008 indicate that 52% of employees experienced emotionally demanding working conditions ‘sometimes’, ‘often’ or ‘always’, whereas this was the case for 46% in DWECS 2005.

Figure 9: Emotional demands, 2005–2008

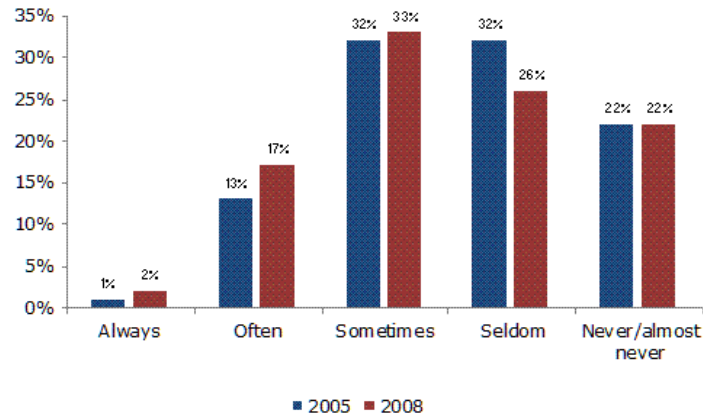


Figure 9: Emotional demands, 2005–2008

Notes: Self-reports on the question: ‘Does your work put you in emotionally disturbing situations?’

Source: Bue Bjørner et al (2010)

However, these increases in psychosocial demands occurred together with relatively better conditions in regard of some ‘positive work factors’ (that is, factors in the working environment contributing to better health and well-being of employees).

Decision latitude

The sense of having a degree of influence over one’s work, measured by DANES as ‘decision latitude’ increased significantly between 2005 and 2008 (Figure 10). The share of employees who replied ‘sometimes’, ‘often’ or ‘always’ when asked whether they are able to influence their work in general increased from 83% in 2005 to 86% in 2008. In the same period, the number of people who felt they can influence the amount of work assigned to them grew from 57% in 2005 to 66% in 2008 (Figure 11).

Like the issue of demands at work, the trends in decision latitude in the Danish working environment are a continuation of the tendencies identified in 2000 and 2005.

Figure 10: Degree of influence over work, 2005–2008

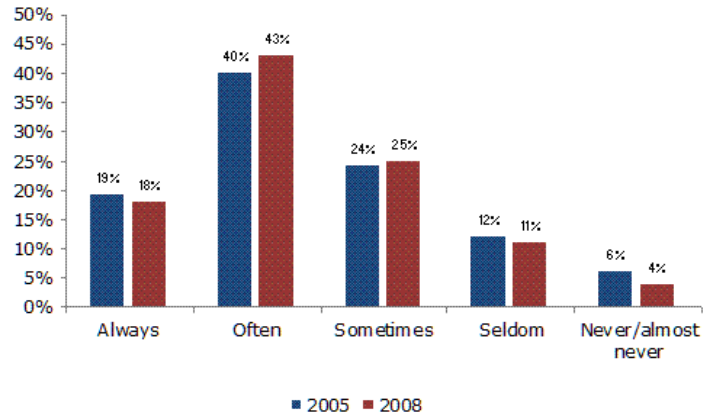


Figure 10: Degree of influence over work, 2005–2008

Notes: Self-reports on the question: ‘Do you have a large degree of influence concerning your work?’

Source: Bue Bjørner et al (2010)

Figure 11: Ability to influence amount of work, 2005–2008

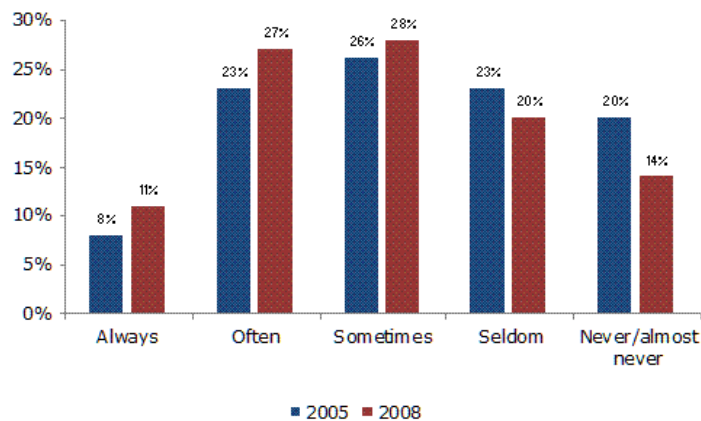


Figure 11: Ability to influence amount of work, 2005–2008

Notes: Self-reports on the question: ‘Can you influence the amount of work assigned to you?’

Source: Bue Bjørner et al (2010)

Skill discretion

Skill discretion, another important factor for the **quality of work**, is also on the rise. The trend is measured by two factors:

- the possibility of learning new things at work (Figure 12);
- the freedom to take the initiative at work (Figure 13).

Between 2005 and 2008, the proportion of employees with the possibility of learning new things ‘to a high degree’ and ‘to a very high degree’ increased by three percentage points, while the share of those who felt the same way about taking initiative at work increased by four percentage points.

Figure 12: Possibility of learning new things at work, 2005–2008

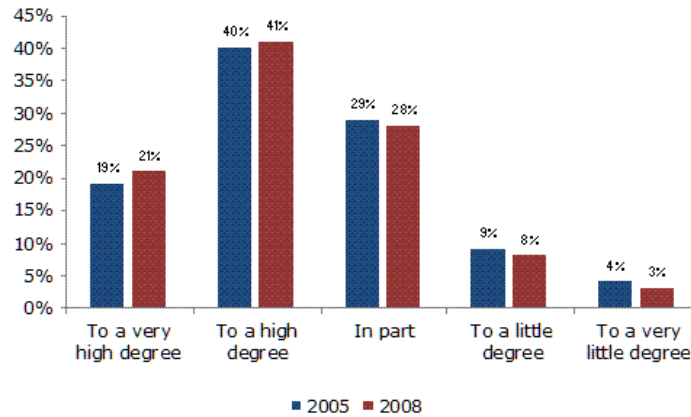


Figure 12: Possibility of learning new things at work, 2005–2008

Notes: Self-reports on the question: ‘Do you have the possibility of learning new things through your work?’

Source: Bue Bjørner et al (2010)

Figure 13: Requirement to take the initiative, 2005–2008

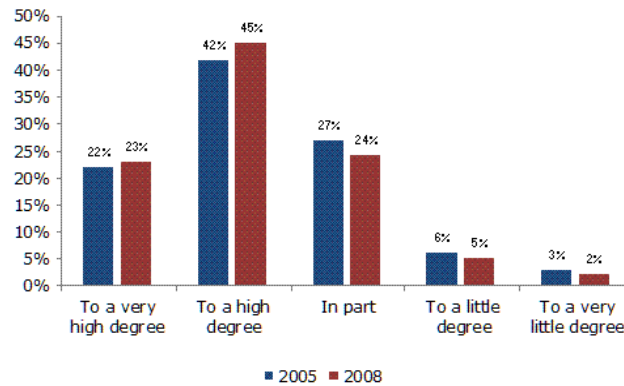


Figure 13: Requirement to take the initiative, 2005–2008

Notes: Self-reports on the question: ‘Does your work require you to take the initiative?’

Source: Bue Bjørner et al (2010)

Physical environment and safety climate

Physical activity

Anticipating the conversion of ‘traditional’ industry jobs into service occupations as the result of the ongoing globalisation of the economy, the 2005 outlook for risk trends for the period 2005–2010 published by the Danish Working Environment Authority’s (AT) (DK0601NU05) foresaw a decrease in physical activity and a subsequent increase in sedentary work in the labour market.

Somewhat surprisingly, there was no such increase between 2000 and 2005, and between 2005 and 2008, the incidence of sedentary work even displayed a slight downward trend (Figure 14). As a consequence, there was a relative increase in the physical activity of employees between 2005 and 2008

Figure 14: Physical activity in the job, 2005–2008

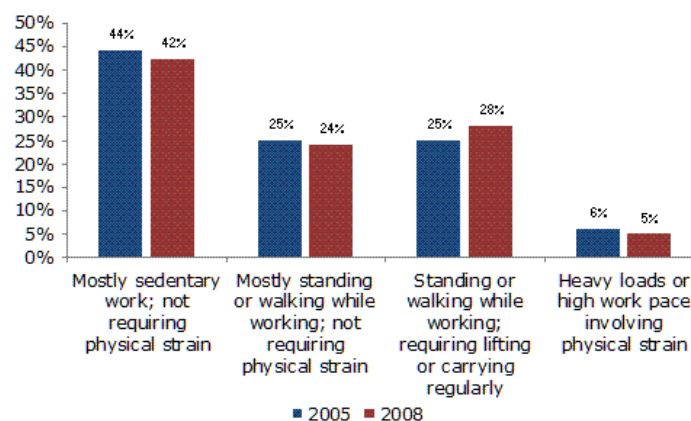


Figure 14: Physical activity in the job, 2005–2008

Source: Bue Bjørner et al (2010)

Safety climate

This increase in the physical activity of employees renders the ‘safety climate’ in the workplace even more important. In Denmark, the focus on safety in DWECS 2005 and DANES 2008 represents a shift in the approach to **occupational accidents and diseases**.

Instead of focusing on risks as in the ‘traditional’ approach in working environment research and risk prevention (see, for example, DK0512SR01 and DK0509NU02), the focus of DWECS 2005 and DANES 2008 is on the positive factor of safety climate. Measuring the safety climate through the perception of individual employees of objective risks in their job and in the way work is organised, DWECS and DANES asked the survey respondents in the context of health and safety whether managers accept that employees take risks when work schedules are tight.

In the labour market as a whole, a weak negative trend towards a poorer safety climate has been identified between 2005 and 2008 (Figure 15). Relatively more employees were undecided on the managers’ likeliness to accept risks (14% in 2005, 18% in 2008), and relatively fewer agreed (23% in 2005, 22% in 2008) or disagreed with the statement (63% in 2005, 60% in 2008). Overall, however, most employees report that the management does not accept employees’ taking risks in the job in order to avoid working longer hours, further pressure from work, etc.

Nevertheless, there is a quite obvious difference in the replies of the total survey populations overall and in the replies from young workers (aged 18–24) (grey shades, Figure 15).

Young workers are far more likely to agree with this statement (37% compared to 22% in 2008) and far less likely to disagree (39% compared to 60% in 2008). The discrepancy between the self-reported safety climate of young workers and employees in general also deepened between 2005 and 2008.

On the whole, there is an indication that the safety climate in jobs predominantly occupied by younger workers is poorer and that, therefore, young people are more exposed to risks at work.

Figure 15: Safety climate, 2005–2008

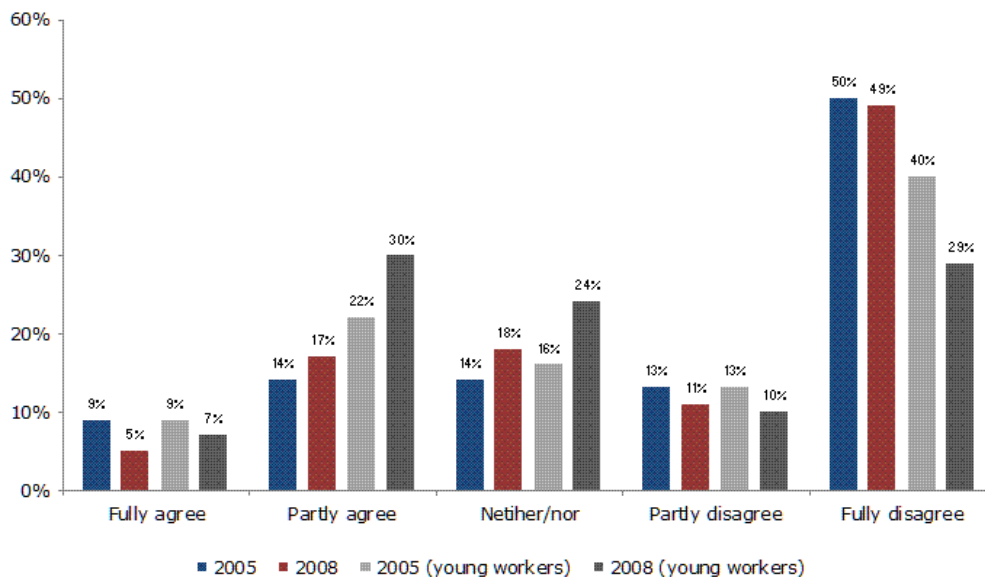


Figure 15: Safety climate, 2005–2008

Notes: Self reports on the statement: ‘Managers accept that employees take risks when there is a tight work schedule’.

Source: Bue Bjørner et al (2010)

Commentary

The results of the assessment of the working environment in 2005 (DWECS) and 2008 (DANES) presented in this survey data report reflect the working environment in a period of economic growth and prior to the international financial crisis. The effect of crisis on the working environment is still unknown and it is possible that some of the trends observable between 2005 and 2008 will be discontinued. Nevertheless, the overview of general trends prior to the crisis presented in DANES provides a solid foundation for interpreting results from the forthcoming fifth wave of DWECS.

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Reference

Bue Bjørner, J., Burr, H., Feveile, H., Løngaard, K., Pejtersen, J., Roepstorff, C., Sønderstrup-Andersen, H.H.K. and Vester Thorsen, S., *Ændringer i det danske arbejdsmiljø fra 2005 til 2008*, Copenhagen, National Research Centre for the Working Environment, 2010, available online at http://www.arbejdsmiljoforskning.dk/upload/rapporter/aendringer_i_det_danske_arbejdsmiljo.pdf

Annex: Technical details on DANES 2008

Survey name	Danish National Working Environment Survey (DANES)
Coverage	Labour market active employees aged 18–59; total national labour market
Collection of data/frequency	Questionnaires submitted to respondents September 2008; data collected October–December 2008
Survey population	DWECS 2005: 6,604 (representative sample) DANES 2008: 4,907 (representative sample)
Response rate	DWECS 2005: 62% DANES 2008: 70%
Types of interviews	Postal or internet questionnaires as primary method for collecting data Telephone interviews to increase the response rate
Strategy for collection of data	All respondents in the sample were invited by letter (including the questionnaire in paper format but leaving open the option of replying via the internet) to participate in the survey. Two written reminders and a third reminder by telephone, with the offer of conducting the interview by telephone, were used in cases of missing replies.
Contact point	Professor Jakob Bue Bjørner , National Research Centre for the Working Environment (NFA)

Notes: The information in the table is valid for the data presented in this survey data report and not the full content of DWECS/DANES surveys. For further technical details on DWECS 2005, see [DK0701019D](#).

Source: Bue Bjørner et al (2010), [Den Nationale Tværsnitsundersøgelse \(in Danish\)](#) and Jakob Bue Bjørner.