Key findings

- In terms of socio-demographic characteristics, the health and social work sector is a female-dominated sector with a higher-than-average proportion of employees (as opposed to self-employed).
- A high proportion of workers in this sector works in large enterprises and has completed third-level education.
- With regard to working conditions, exposure to threats of physical violence and actual acts of violence from colleagues and non-colleagues is highly prevalent in the health and social work sector. However, the sector has relatively favourable scores on skilled work, exposure to ambient risks and long working hours.

Methodology

The European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS) is carried out every five years by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound), a tripartite European agency based in Dublin. The questionnaire is developed by the Eurofound team in close cooperation with an expert questionnaire development group. This group comprises representatives of the European social partners, other EU bodies (European Commission, Eurostat, European Agency for Safety and Health at work), international organisations (OECD, ILO), national statistical institutes, as well as leading European experts in the field. The sample of the EWCS is representative of persons in employment (according to the Eurostat definition this comprises both employees and the self-employed aged 15 years and over) resident in the countries covered for the respective periods. In each country, the EWCS sample followed a multi-stage, stratified and clustered design with a random walk procedure for the selection of the respondents at the last stage. All interviews were conducted face-to-face in the respondent’s own household.

Further Eurofound research on the sector

The health and services sector - what future?
http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/emcc/content/source/tn03008a.htm

Health and social services sector
http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/bysector/health.htm

Further information

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However, the sector scores relatively favourably on several other dimensions. For instance, the sector is found on the favourable side in relation to skilled work (use of quality standards in the work process, solving unforeseen problems, job complexity and learning new things), level of exposure to ambient risks (exposure to vibrations, noise, high/low temperatures, breathing in smoke, fumes, powder or dust, breathing in vapours, handling chemical products or substances) and long working hours.

Working conditions and outcomes

The figure below shows specific dimensions of working conditions with favourable and unfavourable scores in the health and social work sector, taking as a point of reference mean exposure (0.0 score in the chart below).

The main risk to be noted in the health and social work sector is the high exposure to threats of physical violence or actual acts of violence from colleagues and non-colleagues.

How to read the table
The comparison is between the subgroup/sector and the average for all sectors based on the 2005 European Working Conditions Survey sample for the EU27.

▲(p<0.05), ▲▲(p<0.01), and ▲▲▲ (p<0.001) indicate differences between the sector profiled and the sample average at different levels of statistical significance. Each mean is tested with parametric tests of difference (t-test) to determine whether such differences are statistically significant. The more triangles, the higher the statistical significance of the figure (i.e. it is more likely to reflect a real difference in the population). Where estimates are not accompanied by triangles, this indicates that observed differences are not statistically significant.

How to read the figure
For the profiling of the sector, eleven aspects of working conditions (mainly composite indexes based on several variables) and four outcomes (stress, musculoskeletal disorders, absence due to health problems and job satisfaction) were taken into account. In the chart above, p<0.001 represents the highest level of statistical significance, while p<0.01 and p<0.05 indicate comparatively lower levels of statistical significance; ‘ns’ stands for no statistically significant difference. Statistical differences from the average can be either favourable (scores on the left side of the chart) or unfavourable (scores on the right side of the chart) on a specific set of working conditions. Score values greater than +/- 0.2 indicate a small deviation from mean exposure (0.0) while score values ranging from +/- 0.2 to +/- 0.5 and greater than +/- 0.5 indicate respectively substantial and very substantial deviation from mean exposure. For example, the figure above shows that values indicating exposure to violence are highly statistically significant (p<0.001) and are greater than +/- 0.5 meaning that workers in the health and social work sector tend to report a higher level of exposure than the average.
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Health and social work

Differences by other socio-demographic characteristics between this sector and the average for all sectors are not statistically significant and therefore do not merit further analysis here.

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Background

Eurofound’s European Working Conditions Surveys (EWCS) have been carried out every five years since 1991. Each wave of the survey provides an overview of the state of working conditions throughout Europe and indicates the nature and extent of changes affecting the workforce and the quality of work. The fieldwork for Eurofound’s most recent edition of the EWCS was carried out in 2005 in 31 countries, including the 27 EU Member States, plus candidate countries Croatia and Turkey, as well as EFTA countries Norway and Switzerland. In 2005, the sample size was set at 1000 per country (600 for Cyprus, Estonia, Luxembourg, Malta and Slovenia).

Following the 2005 survey, Eurofound asked TNO Work & Employment to perform a secondary statistical analysis of the data from the fourth EWCS 2005 on sector profiles with regard to working conditions in the 27 Member States. For the analysis, NACE Revision 1.1 was applied. The findings are set out in 26 fact sheets, each covering one of the 26 sectors in the NACE classification. Each fact sheet presents:

- a profile of the sector’s socio-demographic characteristics based on data at NACE at 1 and 2 digit level;
- a profile of working conditions in the sector based on data at NACE at 1 and 2 digit level.

This fact sheet presents a snapshot of working conditions in the health and social work sector (Nace Rev. 1.1 N).

Fact sheet

Sector profile

The health and social work sector is a female-dominated sector, with a proportion of only 21.4% male workers compared to the sector average of 55.5%. The sector is also characterised by a higher than average proportion of employees: 90.6% compared to the cross sector average of 83.3%. More than half of all health and social workers (57.7%) are employed in large enterprises (250 people or more).

Workers in this sector report having attained a relatively high educational level. Some 12.7% have completed post-secondary level and an even higher proportion of workers have completed tertiary education: 38.3% with ISCED 5 and 4.8% with ISCED 6; just 31.6% have only upper secondary education compared to an average of 44.5%.

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This is a revision of the ‘General Industrial Classification of Economic Activities within the European Communities’, known by the acronym NACE and originally published by Eurostat in 1970. The NACE code was subsequently revised (REV. 1.1) in the 1990s.