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**The Austrian Employee Health Monitor**

**Teacher, shelf stacker, textile worker & Co:  
these jobs affect the mental health of people**

Press conference on  
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## **Almost 30 percent of all employees suffer from high psychological strain**

The ever increasing pressure to perform has resulted in a high number of mentally stressed employees. 29 percent of all employees in Austria are under psychological pressure. Those most affected are found among the blue-collar workers, employees in the public service, and teachers.

In the period between 1994 and 2014 the number of sick days because of job-related mental illness rose from one million to 3.6 million. According to calculations of the Viennese Chamber of Labour, the resultant economic loss adds up to 3.3 billion euros per year.

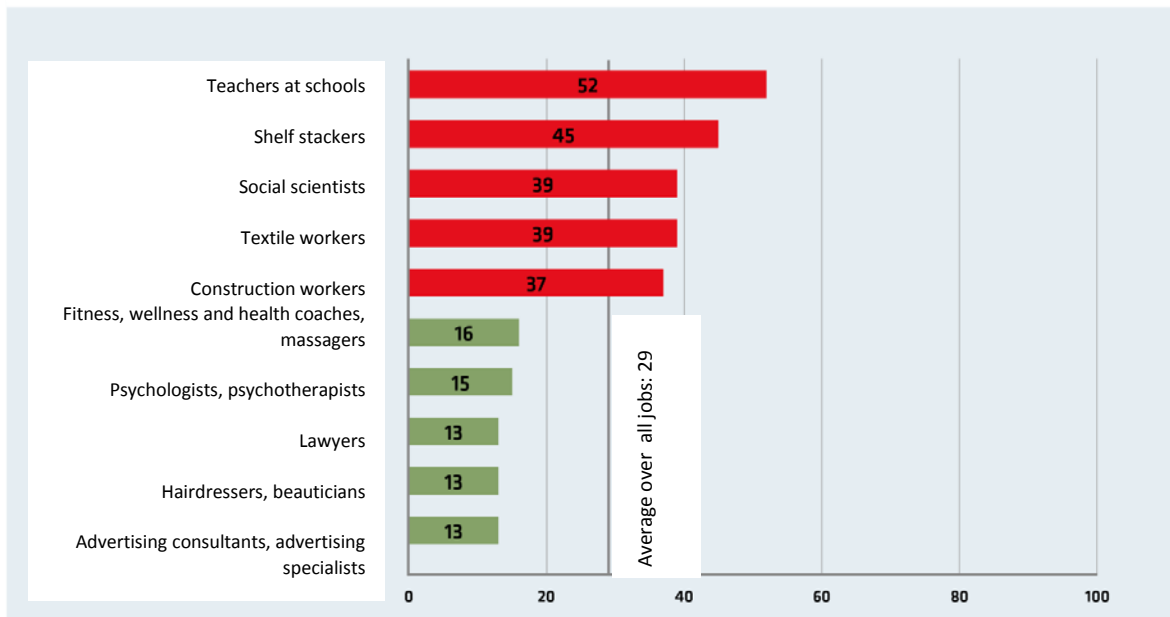
The high number of sick days is not only caused by a constant increase of burdening factors in the working world. It is also attributed to the fact that sick leaves caused by mental illness are particularly long. While an infection of the respiratory system takes an average of 4.9 calendar days and a musculoskeletal disorder 13.8 days to cure, a person suffering from mental illness will be away sick for 36.2 calendar days. Consequently, only 2.5 percent of sick leaves are caused by psychological illness, but 10 percent of the sick days.

## **Mental stress largely depends on the job**

Contrary to popular opinion, according to which stress and psychological burden are mainly managerial diseases, the occupational groups most affected are actually blue-collar workers and civil servants: the highest mental stress is experienced by teachers in schools (52 percent), shelf stackers (45 percent), textile workers and social scientists (39 percent, each), as well as construction workers (37 percent).

By comparison: general managers (24 percent) or department managers (20 percent) suffer from psychological strain to a much lower extent. Hairdressers, advertisers and lawyers (13 percent, each) are least likely to be affected by mental stress.

## JOBS FEATURING THE HIGHEST AND THE LOWEST MENTAL STRESS



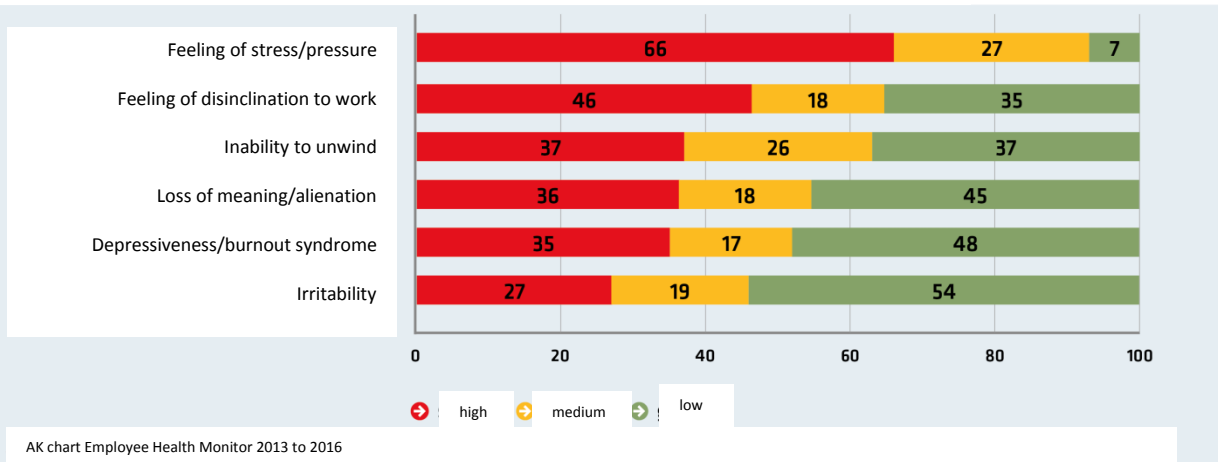
AK chart Employee Health Monitor 2013 to 2016: share of employees among an occupational group suffering from mental stress (in percent)

### Two thirds feel stressed

High stress combined with a narrow creative scope, as it is found among blue-collar workers operating machines or working on construction sites, leads to mental stress quite frequently. Two thirds of all employees say that they are burdened by stress. This phenomenon is less pronounced among lawyers, advertisers or psychologists, who are able to organize most of their work autonomously.

Almost half of the employees are demotivated, mainly because of the conditions at work. More than one third is unable to unwind after work, the same percentage have become alienated from their work as they don't find any sense in it. Pressure of time plays an important role, too: 40 percent of the employees pressed for time are under multiple psychological stress. Blue-collar workers perceive their jobs as monotonous and devoid of meaning. A growing number of employees perceive the economic development as inscrutable, their professional future as insecure. Symptoms of exhaustion and depression (often referred to as "burnout syndrome") are on the rise.

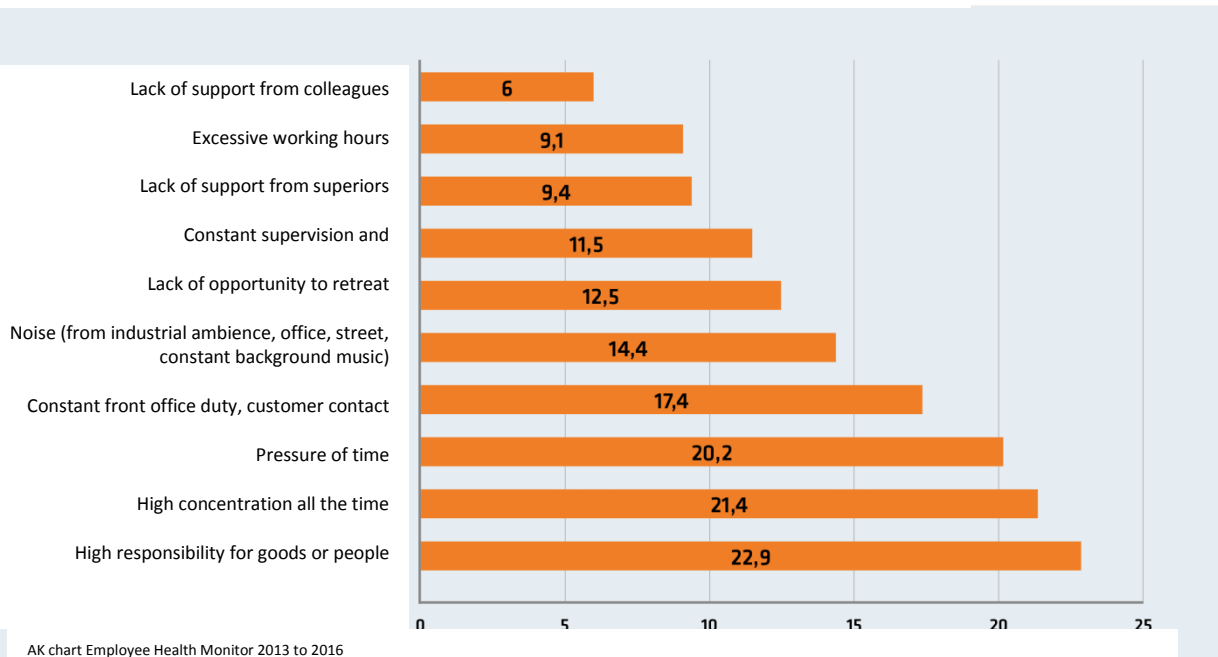
## MENTAL STRESS AT WORK (IN PERCENT)



## Causes of mental stress in the job

High responsibility, constant concentration and pressure of time are the main reasons for mental stress felt by employees, followed by front office duty and customer contact, noise, insufficient opportunity to retreat, control and supervision, as well as a lack of support from the boss.

## STRESSFUL WORKING CONDITIONS (IN PERCENT)



**High stress leads to lower satisfaction with work and life as a whole**

Someone suffering from high mental strain in his/her job is much less satisfied with his/her work, but also with life as a whole: while 88 percent of the employees feeling low psychological pressure are satisfied with their lives and 84 percent with their jobs, only 66 percent of those feeling highly stressed are satisfied with their lives and 61 percent with their jobs.

The assessment of the state of health and physical capability, too, depends on the degree of psychological burden. 88 percent, each, of the people feeling no or low mental stress consider themselves healthy and capable, compared to only a little less than two thirds among employees suffering from mental stress.

### **Seven out of ten employees are inadequately supported by their superiors**

Superiors play a crucial role: three quarters of the people without mental stress are sufficiently supported by their superiors. Among those feeling mentally strained, the share is only 30 percent. Conversely, seven out of ten people suffering from psychological burden also suffer from a lack of support from their superiors.

Ultimately, mental strain also affects people's assessment in terms of their further career. Almost three quarters of the employees without psychological burden can imagine staying in their jobs until retirement, compared to only 57 percent of those mentally strained.

## **Requirements and suggested solutions**

The main reasons for work-induced stress are high workloads and pressure of time combined with insufficient autonomy of working and further training opportunities. Therefore, employees need a good and healthy balance between the requirements of work and the related resources to remain fit for work. What they also need is a legal claim to unpaid leave for further training or education as well as part-time work for older employees.

Sick leaves because of mental illness have more than doubled over the past ten years. Pressure of time, insufficient personnel and little autonomous leeway in terms of own work assignments make people ill.

But in case of mental illness, too, it has to be suspected that many employees go to work instead of recovering at home or getting therapy. This suspicion is substantiated by the dramatic increase in the prescription of antidepressants. In 2005, 528,771 drugs were prescribed, which cost 10.5 million euros. In 2015, the number of prescriptions had reached 758,736 with costs amounting to 11.5 million euros. This is an increase in prescriptions by more than 43 percent, which is clearly more than the increase in the employment level.

Therefore, an evaluation of psychological stress at work and, above all, an obligatory implementation of the resultant measures should be paramount. Companies that consciously jeopardize the health of their employees should be called to account.

## **Improvement of workplaces and conditions at work**

Workplace health promotion has to be advanced. So far, it has mainly addressed employees individually encouraging them to take up a healthier lifestyle.

What is even more important, however, is the implementation of specific improvements concerning the specific workplace and working conditions following a comprehensive analysis of the circumstances in the company (employee attitude survey, health projects). In this regard, the influence of managerial behaviour also plays an important role.

People in companies often don't know how to deal with employees suffering from psychological stress after their (often quite long) sick leaves. More and more companies have turned to holding so-called “return-to-work interviews”, which put pressure on the employees and result in the collection of highly disputable health data. Such interviews are unacceptable.

Instead, a workplace incorporation management should ensure that employees returning from sick leave are not exposed to the same wearing and sickening conditions, and that they are allowed to return to their work step by step and without being put under pressure.

## **The Austrian Employee Health Monitor**

The Employee Health Monitor is a comprehensive survey of the subjective conditions of employees regarding health. The data established include typical impairments and psychosomatic symptoms (cardiovascular problems, sleep disorders, concentration disorders, indigestion, headaches, ailments of the musculoskeletal system, etc.) as well as mental impairments (irritability, depressiveness, inability to unwind, loss of motivation, resignation, etc.), but also positive indicators of health (self-development, self-efficacy, well-being, capability, finding a meaning in life, etc.).

The data are collected on the basis of face-to-face interviews within the scope of a multi-topic survey performed by IFES, the institute for empirical social research. The sample of 4,000 interviews per year makes the Health Monitor representative of all employed people in Austria. The population consists of wage earners in Austria from 15 years of age. Get more information at [ooe.arbeiterkammer.at/Arbeitsgesundheitsmonitor](https://ooe.arbeiterkammer.at/Arbeitsgesundheitsmonitor)