European Agency for Safety and Health at Work

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Annex to Report: Lifting postures – Facts and figures

National Report: Belgium

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This document is an annex to the Agency's Report "Work-related musculoskeletal disorders – Facts and figures" - Belgium

You can find the full report –in English only- on the Agency's website:
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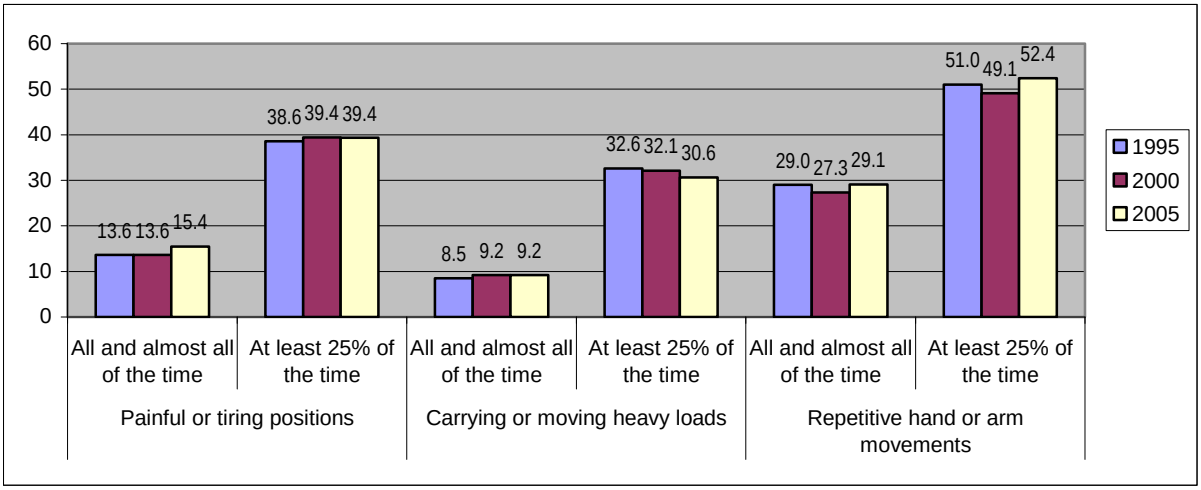
Summary

Exposure to painful and tiring positions in the workplace, carrying or moving heavy loads and repetitive hand or arm movements are quite common in the Belgian workforce. In 2005, four out of ten Belgian workers were exposed to painful or tiring positions and three out of ten workers were exposed to carrying or moving heavy loads at least 25% of their working time. Meanwhile, the share of workers reporting exposure to repetitive hand or arm movements at least a quarter of their working time was higher, affecting more than half of all surveyed workers. Exposure rates have been generally on the rise since 1995.

Figure 1: Exposure to painful/ tiring positions, carrying/ moving heavy loads and repetitive hand/arm movements (general)



European Survey on Working Conditions, 1995-2000-2005

Exposure to painful or tiring positions at some stage seems to slightly increase with age, while moving or handling heavy objects decrease among the 55 and over age group.

Although gender differences are quite small, male workers are slightly more exposed to painful or tiring positions and to carrying or moving heavy objects. Among male workers exposure rates are rising since 1990.

Sectors most at risk for both painful/tiring positions and carrying/moving heavy loads are construction, hotels and restaurants, whole sale and retail, repairs, agriculture and mining and manufacturing. Workers in financial intermediation seem to be the least exposed.

An occupational breakdown shows that craft and related trade workers and skilled agricultural and fishery workers are the most exposed to these physical risk factors for the development of MSDs. Clerks seem the least exposed to these work place hazards.

Exposure to painful or tiring working positions and carrying or moving heavy objects is more common among self-employed than among employees.

Source description

Statistical sources

Title	European Survey on Working Conditions
Acronym	ESWC
Institution	European Foundation for the Improvement of Working and Living Conditions (Dublin)
Country	EU
Periodicity	Every 4 years: 1991-1996-2000-2005
Type	Employee Survey
URL	http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/working/surveys/index.htm
Demographic group	Employees, self-employed without personnel and self-employed with less than 10 employees
Objectives	Monitoring of trends in working conditions for employees and the self-employed throughout the European Union. This Survey provides an opportunity to monitor working conditions in the EU and to analyze specific themes in depth, such as: sector differences, working conditions and gender, age, or employment contracts, work organization, working hours, etc.
Description	Face-to face interviews in all EU countries, with approx. 1,000 people in each country are selected (random walk), structured questionnaire
Content	This survey describes a broad range of questions in the field of working conditions.
Question	Q11 ▪ a) Does your work involve painful or tiring positions? ▪ c) Does your work involve carrying or moving heavy loads? ▪ e) Does your work involve repetitive hand or arm movements?

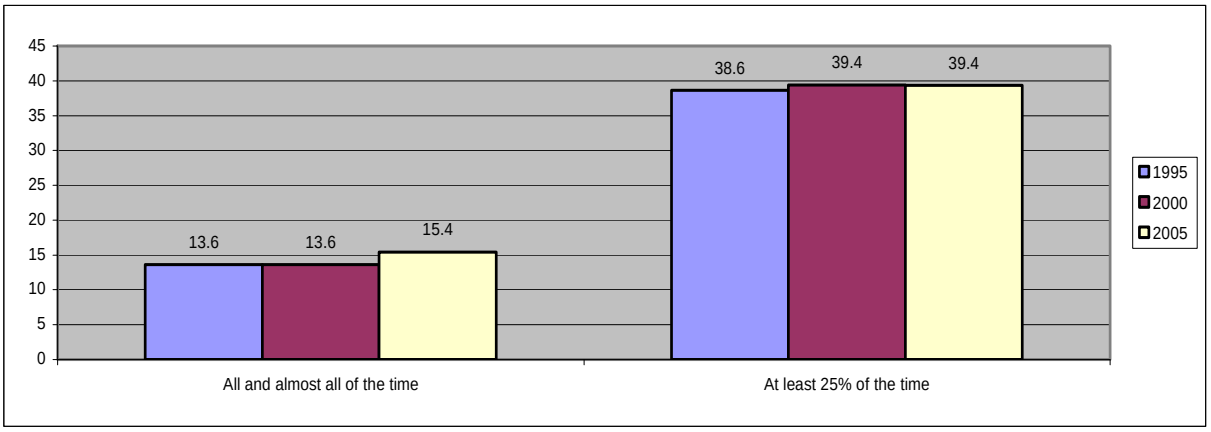
1. General prevalence

Four out of ten Belgian workers exposed to painful or tiring positions, three out of ten workers exposed to carrying or moving heavy loads and one in two exposed to repetitive hand or arm movement at least 25% of their working time in 2005. Exposure rates have generally increased since 1995.

According to the Belgian results of the Fourth European Survey on Working Conditions (ESWC), 15.4% of workers reported being exposed to painful or tiring positions all or almost all of their working time in 2005. About 39.4% of workers reported being exposed at least 25% of their working time, while 60.6% of them reported never or almost never being exposed to painful or tiring positions during the working time.

Since 1995, the proportion of those continuously affected and those being exposed at least 25% of the working time has increased slightly.

Figure 2: Percentage workers being exposed to painful or tiring positions in the workplace 1995, 2000, 2005



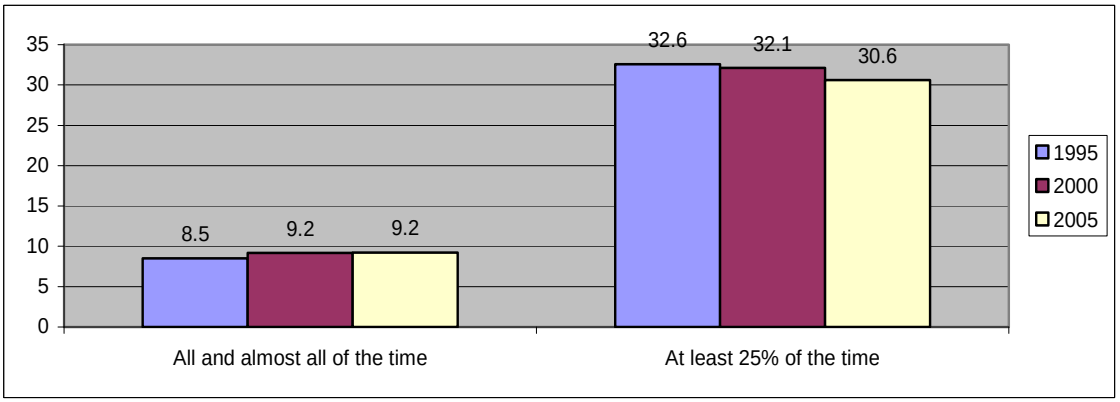
European Survey on Working Conditions, 1995-2000-2005

The ESWC also shows that in 2005 about 9.2% of workers reported being exposed to carrying or moving heavy loads in the workplace all or almost all of the time. About 30.6% reported being exposed at least 25% of their working time, while 69.4% of workers reported never or almost never being exposed to carrying or moving heavy loads during the working time.

Since 1995, the proportion of both those continuously affected (all and almost all of the time) has increased.

Figure 3: Percentage workers being exposed to carrying or moving heavy loads in the workplace, 1995, 2000, 2005

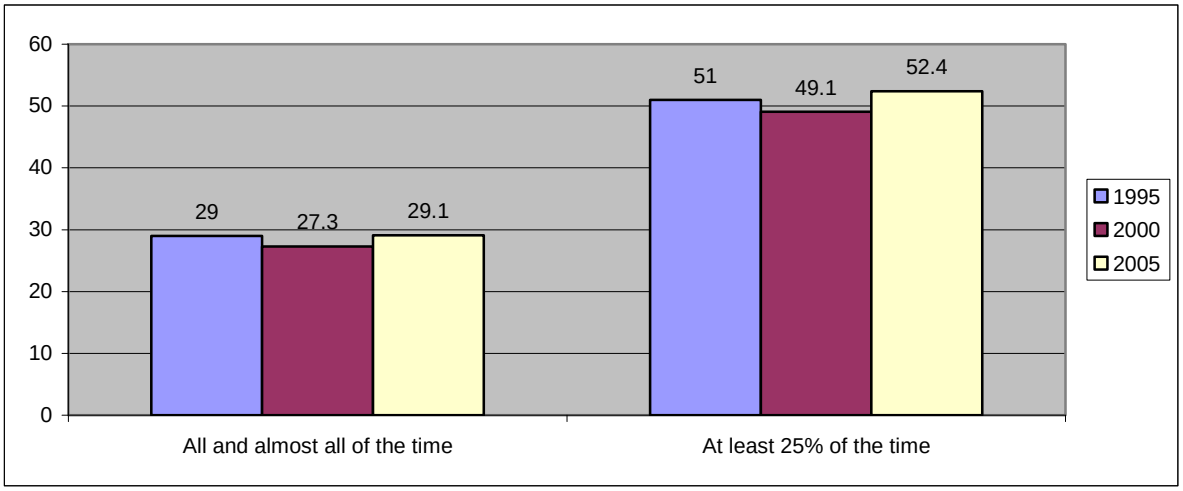
European Survey on Working Conditions, 1995-2000-2005



Finally, 2005 results also show that almost one in three Belgian workers (29.1%) reported being exposed to repetitive hand or arm movements at work all and almost of the time, while over half of all surveyed workers (52.4%) stated being exposed at least 25% of their working time. Around 47.6% of workers reported never or almost never being exposed to repetitive hand or arm movements at work.

Since 1995, exposure rates to repetitive hand or arm movements at work have generally increased.

Figure 4: Percentage workers being exposed to repetitive hand or arm movements in the workplace, 1995, 2000, 2005



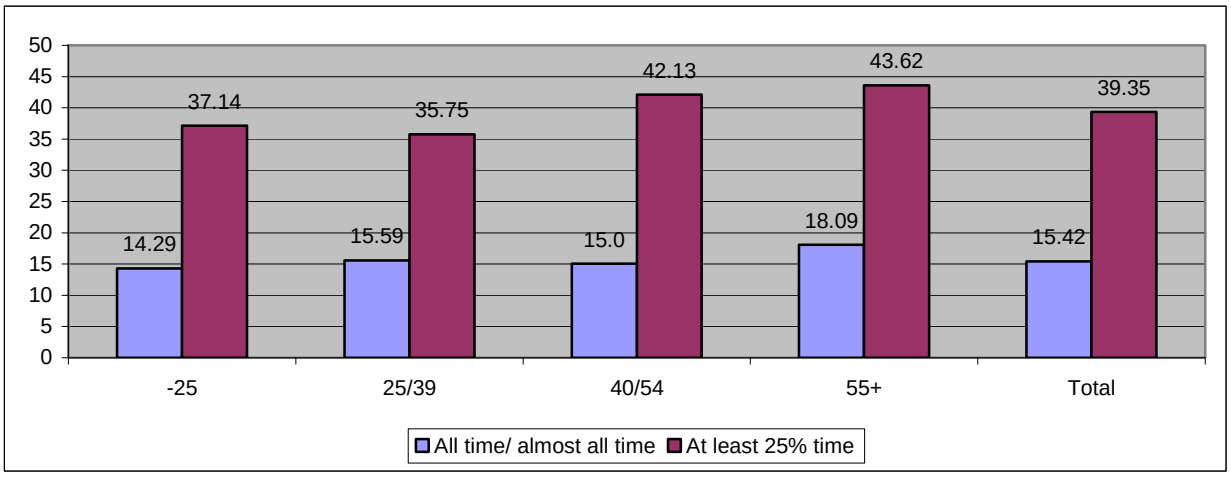
European Survey on Working Conditions, 1995-2000-2005

2. By age

Exposure to painful or tiring positions and moving or handling heavy objects increases slightly with age. According to the ESWC, exposure at some stage (at least a quarter of the time) to painful or tiring positions in the workplace seems to increase with age in 2005: from 37.1% of workers aged under 25 years to 43.6% among those aged 55 and over.

A relatively similar pattern is found when it comes to continuous exposure, which is slightly more frequent among older workers.

Figure 5: Exposure to painful/ tiring positions (by age), 2005

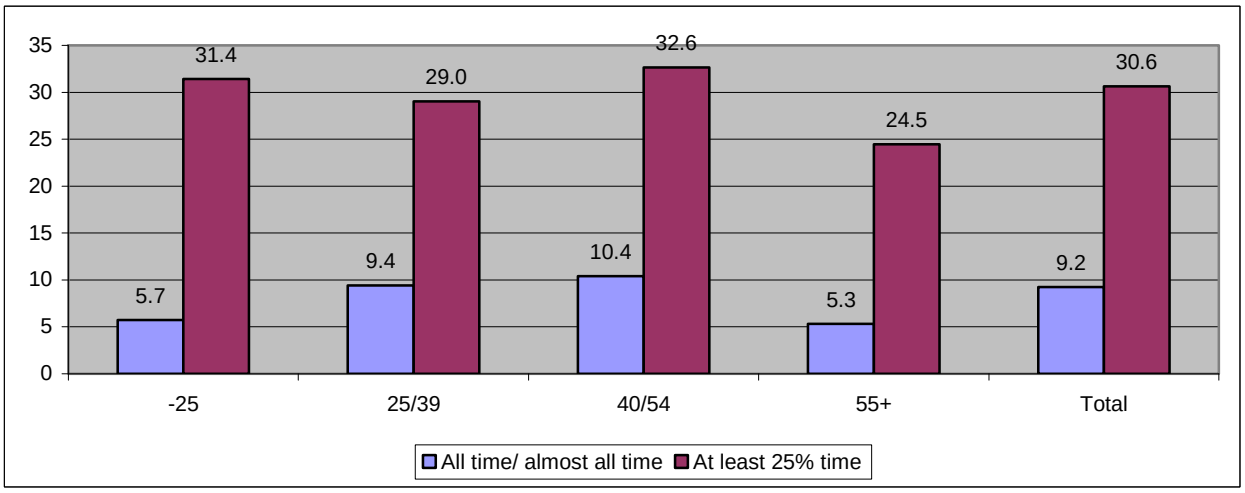


European Survey on Working Conditions 2005

Meanwhile, exposure at some stage (at least a quarter of the time) to carrying or moving heavy loads remains relatively similar for all age groups except for that of older workers (55 and over): 24.5% of them reported carrying or moving heavy loads at least 25% of their working time.

Continuous exposure (all and almost all of the time) to carrying or moving heavy loads grows with age until the 40-54 age group (10.4% of workers in this age group), only to drop among those aged 55 and over: 5.3%.

Figure 6: Exposure to carrying/ moving heavy loads (by age), 2005

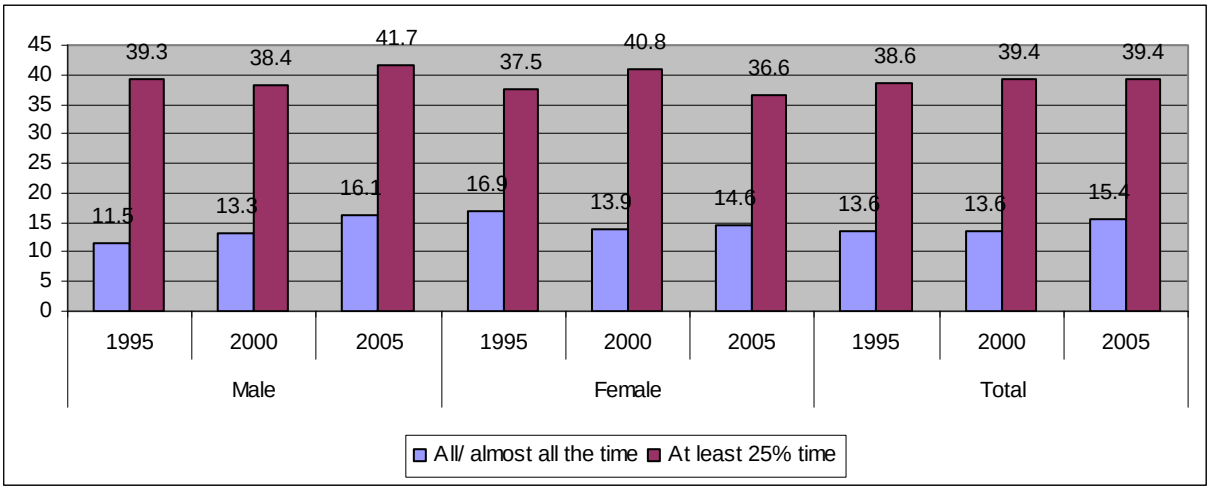


European Survey on Working Conditions 2005

3. By gender

Male workers slightly more exposed to painful or tiring positions and to carrying or moving heavy objects. Both exposures are increasing among male workers. The ESWC findings reveal that male workers reported slightly higher exposure to painful or tiring positions in the workplace in 2005: about 16.1% of male workers reported being exposed all or almost all of the working time and about 41.7% reported being exposed at least a quarter of the working time, compared to 14.6% and 36.6%, respectively, among female workers. Exposure rates have increased for male workers since 1995.

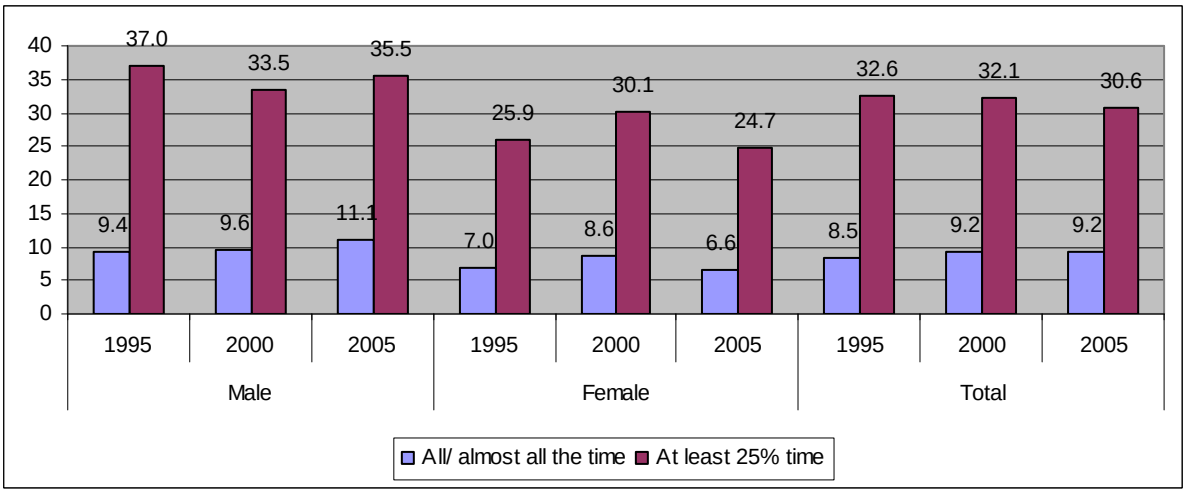
Figure 7: Percentage workers exposed to painful or tiring positions in the workplace (by gender), 1995, 2000, 2005



European Survey on Working Conditions, 1995-2000-2005

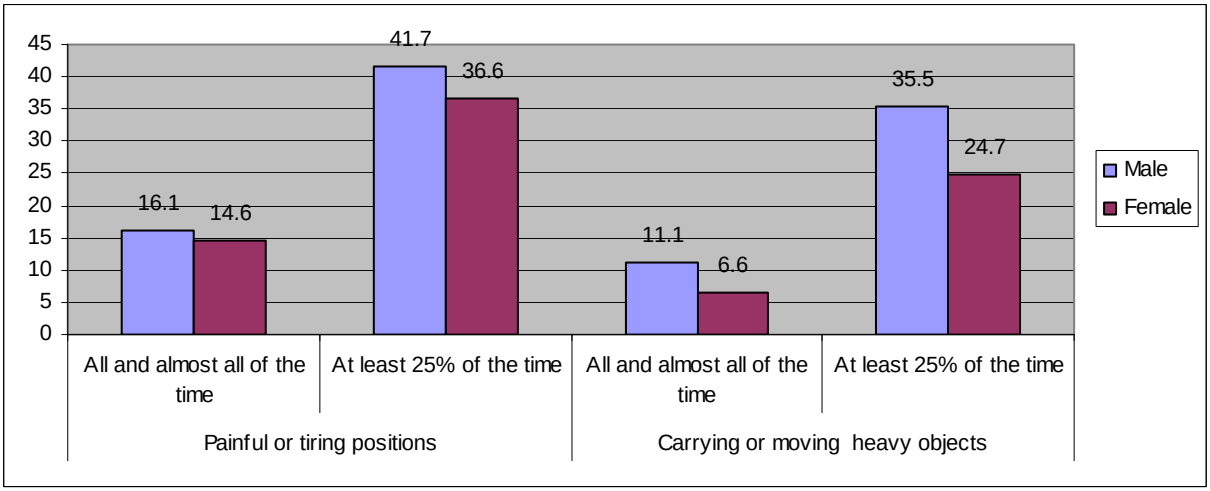
The Belgian results of the ESWC also show that male workers reported being slightly more exposed to carrying or moving heavy loads in the workplace in 2005. About 11.1% reported continuously being exposed and 35.5% reported being exposed at least a quarter of the working time, compared to 6.6% and 24.7%, respectively, among female workers. Exposure rates have increased for male workers since 1995.

Figure 8: Percentage workers being exposed to carrying or moving heavy loads in the workplace (by gender), 1995, 2000, 2005



European Survey on Working Conditions, 1995-2000-2005

Figure 9: Exposure to painful/ tiring positions and carrying/ moving heavy loads (by gender), 2005



European Survey on Working Conditions 2005

4. By sector

Sector groups (sections in NACE Rev 1.1) used in figures:

A: Agriculture, hunting, forestry

B: Fishing

C: Mining

D: Manufacturing

E: Electricity, gas and water

F: Construction

G: Whole sale and retail, repairs

H: Hotels and restaurants

I: Transport and communication

J: Financial intermediation

K: Real estate, business activity

L: Public administration and defence

M: Education

N: Health and social work

O: Other community, social and personal service activities

P: Activities of households

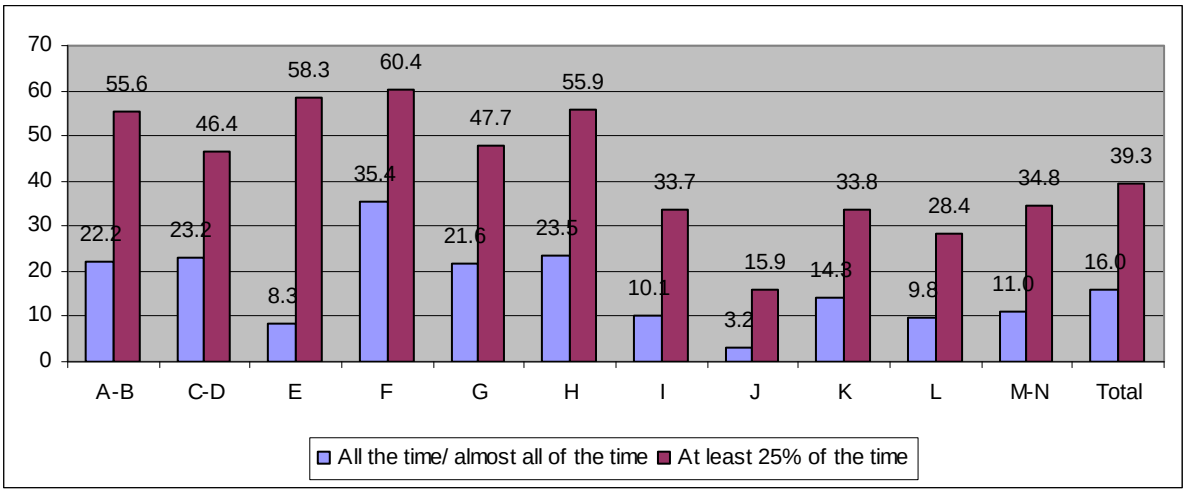
Q: Extra-territorial organizations and bodies

Construction, hotels and restaurants and agriculture, most exposed. Financial intermediation, least exposed. A sector breakdown of the Belgian results of the ESWC shows that exposure to painful or

tiring positions is most pronounced within construction (60.4% at least 25% of the time), electricity, gas and water supply (58.3%), hotels and restaurants (55.9%) and agriculture (55.6%).

Financial intermediation seems to be the least exposed, with 15.9% of workers reporting exposure to painful or tiring positions at least 25% of the time.

Figure 10: Percentage workers being exposed to painful or tiring positions in the workplace (by sector), 2005

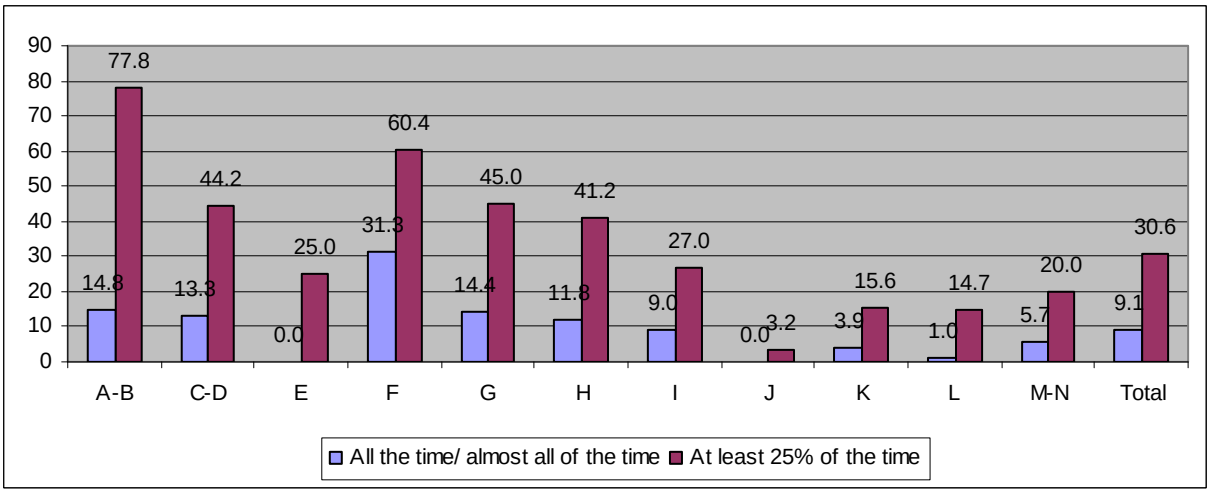


European Survey on Working Conditions 2005

The ESWC 2005 also shows that exposure to carrying or moving heavy loads is highest amongst workers in agriculture (77.8% at least 25% of the time), construction (60.4%), whole sale and retail trade (45%), manufacture and mining (44.2%) and hotels and restaurants (41.2%).

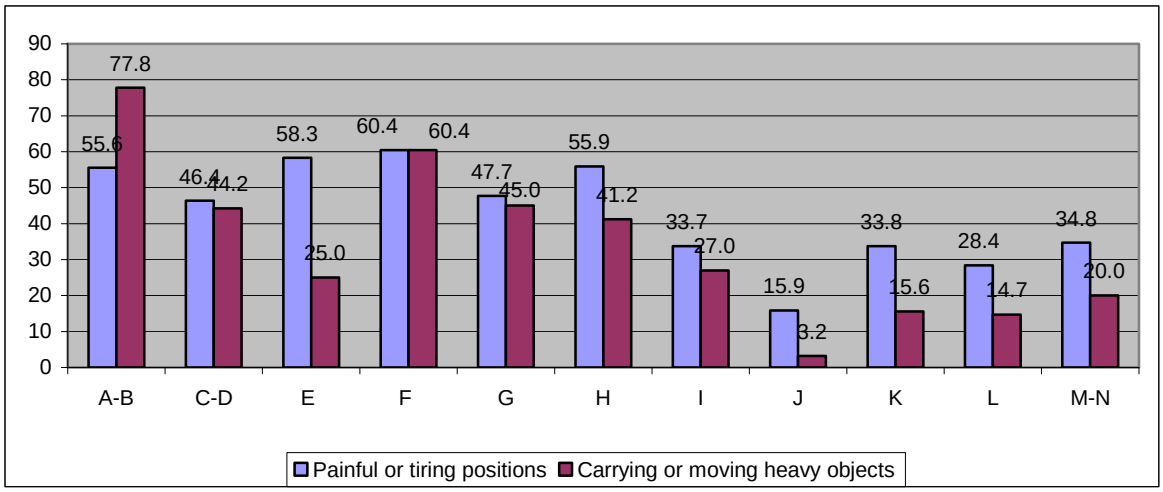
Financial intermediation, again, reports the lowest exposure rates: 3.2% at least 25% of the time.

Figure 11: Percentage workers being exposed to carrying or moving heavy loads in the workplace (by sector), 2005



European Survey on Working Conditions 2005

Figure 12: Exposure to painful/ tiring positions and carrying/ moving heavy loads (by sector) at least a quarter of the working time, 2005



European Survey on Working Conditions 2005

5. By occupation

ISCO Groups of occupation used in tables and figures:

ISCO 1: Legislators, senior officials and managers

ISCO 2: Professionals

ISCO 3: Technicians and associate professionals

ISCO 4: Clerks

ISCO 5: Service workers and shop and market sales workers

ISCO 6: Skilled agricultural and fishery workers

ISCO 7: Craft and related trades workers

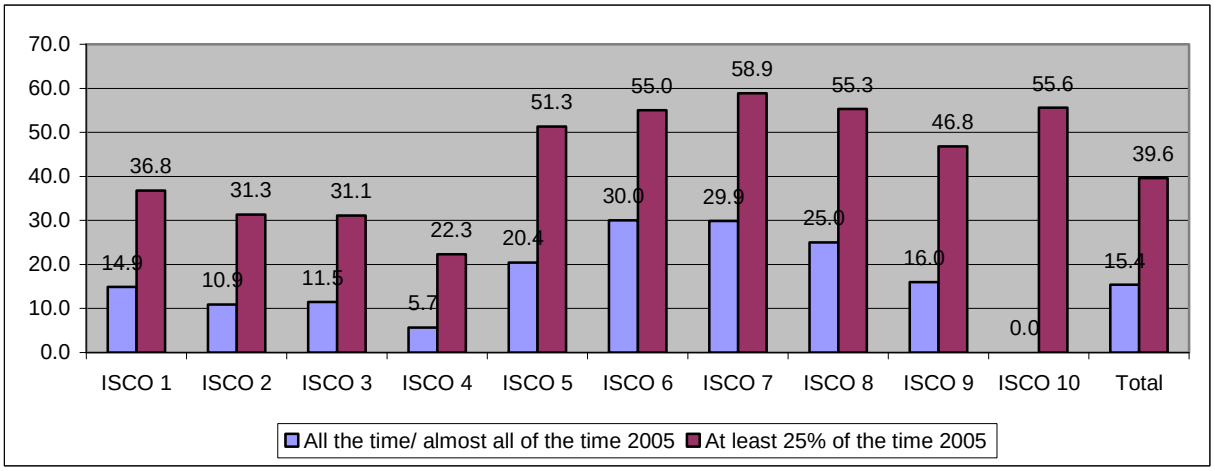
ISCO 8: Plant and machine operators and assemblers

ISCO 9: Elementary occupations

ISCO 10: Armed force

Craft and related trade workers, skilled agricultural and fishery workers and plant and machine operators and assemblers, most exposed. Clerks least exposed. An occupational breakdown shows that exposure to painful or tiring positions is most pronounced among craft and related trade workers (58.9% at least 25% of the time) and plant and machine operators and assemblers (55.3%), followed by skilled agricultural and fishery workers (55% at least 25% of the time). Results of workers in armed forces need to be interpreted with caution due to the small sample size. Clerks seem to be the least exposed to painful or tiring positions: 22.3% at least 25% of the time.

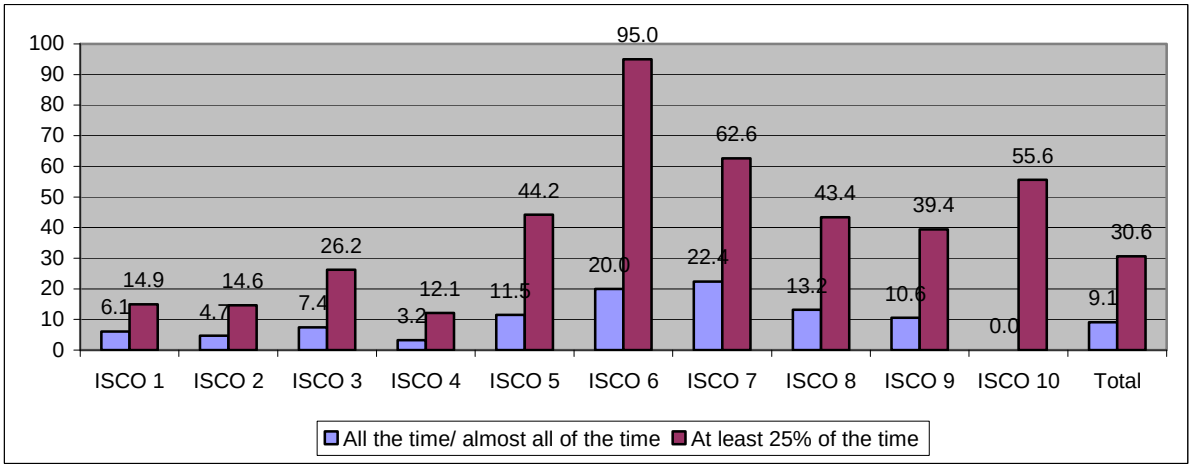
Figure 13: Percentage workers being exposed to painful or tiring positions in the workplace (by occupation), 2005



European Survey on Working Conditions 2005

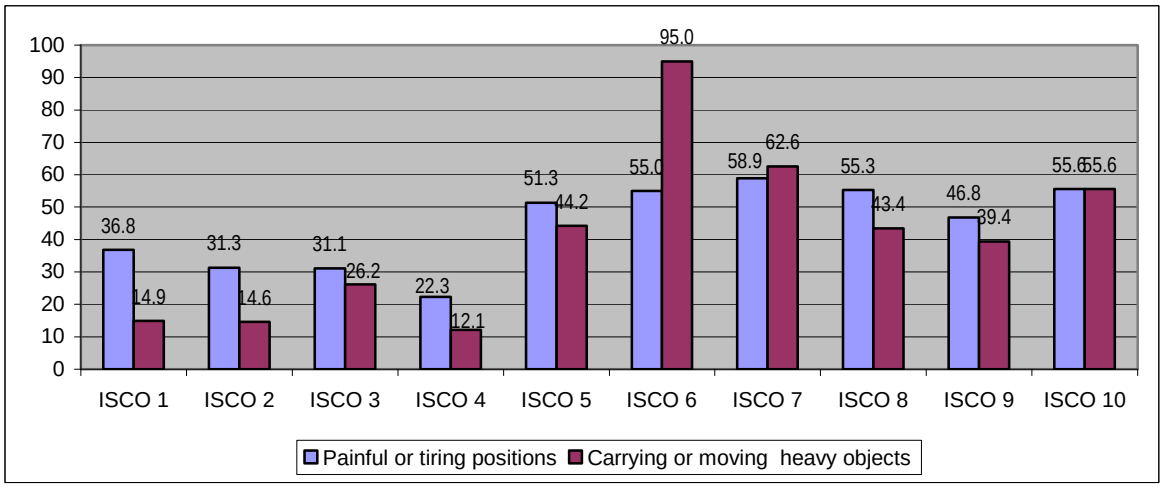
Concerning exposure to carrying or moving heavy loads, ESWC results show that it is most pronounced among skilled agricultural and fishery workers (95% at least 25% of the time), craft and related trade workers (62.6%), service workers and shop and market sales workers (44.2%) and plant and machine operators and assemblers (43.4%). Again, results of workers in armed forces need to be interpreted with caution due to the small sample size. Clerks appear to be the least exposed: 12.1% at least 25% of the time.

Figure 14: Percentage workers being exposed to carrying or moving heavy loads in the workplace (by occupation), 2005



European Survey on Working Conditions 2005

Figure 15: Exposure to painful/ tiring positions and carrying/ moving heavy loads at least a quarter of the working time (by occupation), 2005

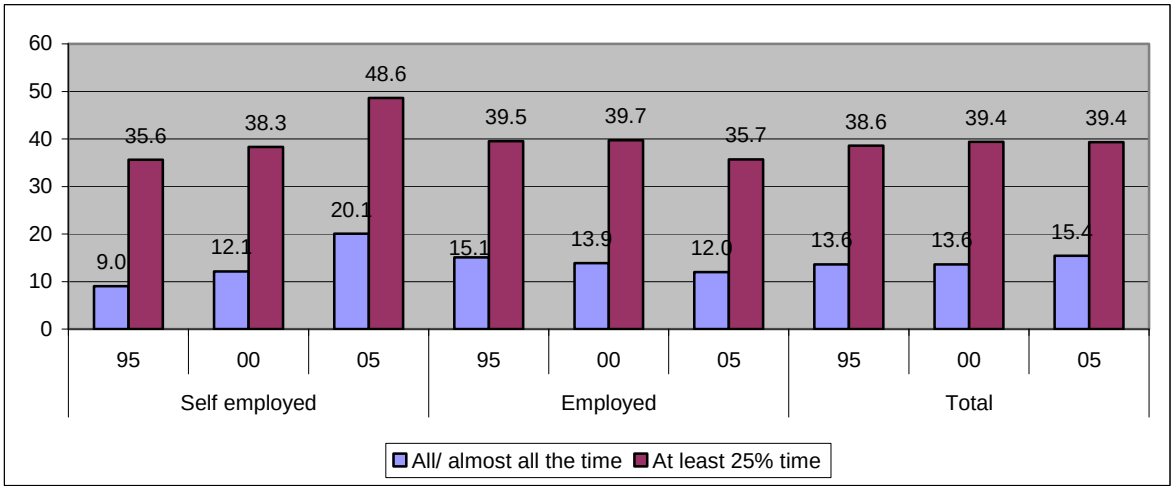


European Survey on Working Conditions 2005

6. By employment status

Self-employed workers more exposed to painful or tiring working positions and moving or carrying heavy objects in the workplace. According to the ESWC self-employed workers report being slightly more exposed to painful or tiring positions than employees: about 20.1% of self-employed report exposure all or almost all of the working time compared to 12% among employed workers, while 48.6% of self-employed report being exposed at least 25% of their working time compared to 35.7% among employed workers.

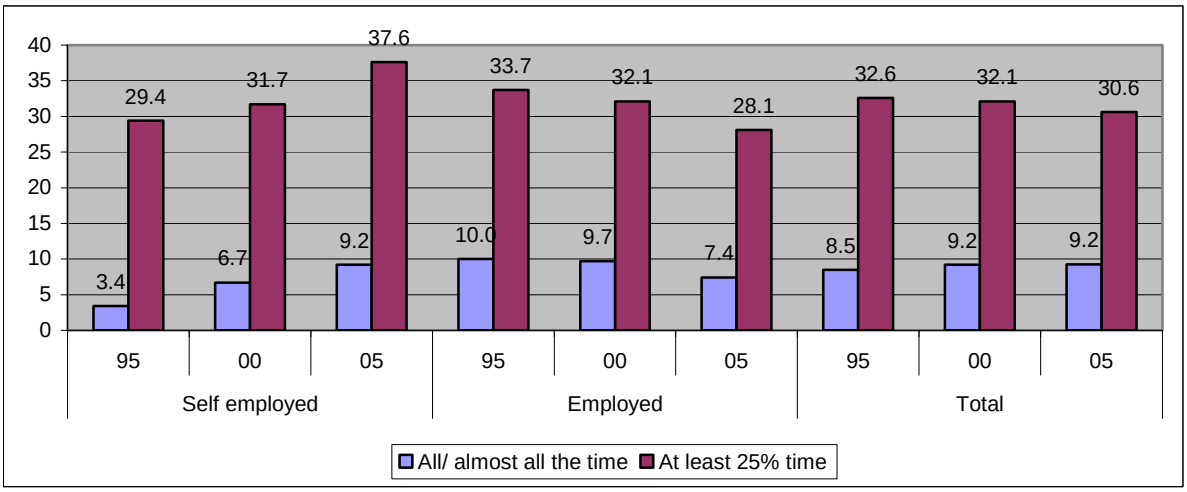
Figure 16: Percentage workers being exposed to painful or tiring positions in the workplace (by employment status), 1995, 2000, 2005



European Survey on Working Conditions, 1995-2000-2005

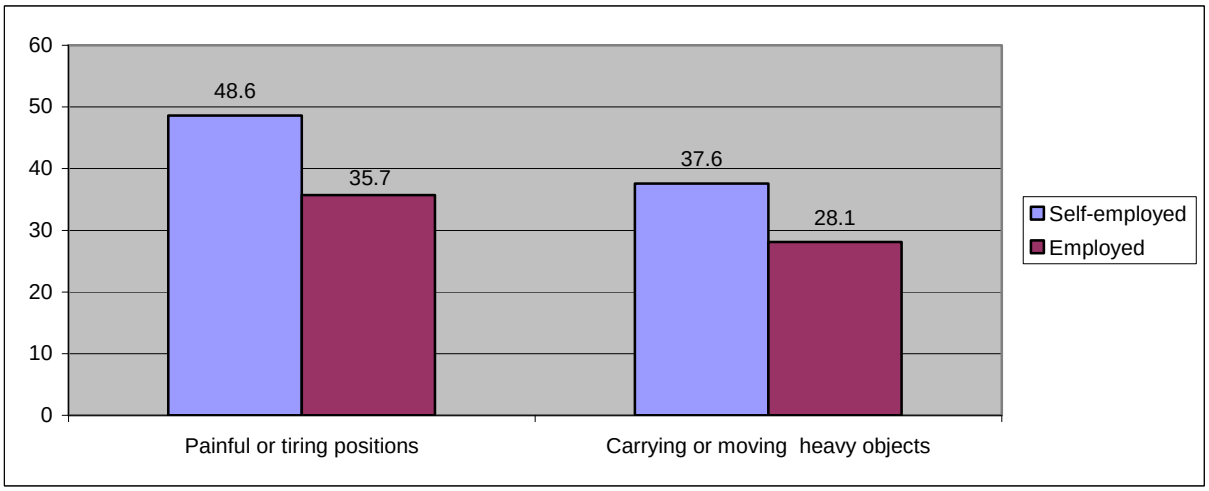
As far as exposure to carrying or moving heavy loads is concerned, self-employed workers report a slightly higher exposure than their employed counterparts: about 9.2% of self-employed report carrying or moving heavy loads all or almost all of the working time compared to 7.4% among employed workers, while 37.6% of self-employed report being exposed at least 25% of the working time compared to 28.1% among employed workers.

Figure 17: Percentage workers being exposed to carrying or moving heavy loads in the workplace, by employment status, 1995, 2000, 2005



European Survey on Working Conditions, 1995-2000-2005

Figure 18: Exposure to painful/ tiring positions and carrying/ moving heavy loads at least a quarter of the working time (by employment status), 2005



European Survey on Working Conditions 2005