



WORK IN THE SERVICE SECTOR

The service sector is a major employer. The number of people employed in wholesale and retail trade in Finland exceeds 250,000, while the accommodation and food service sector employs roughly 90,000 people. Those working in the service sector include, for instance, salespersons, café workers, hotel housekeepers, cooks, restaurant managers and directors. The sector comprises a wide range of professions and work tasks, which is also reflected in the different workload factors and competence requirements.

There are many ways of managing the workload of employees in the service sector

Work in the service sector can be demanding in many ways. Work stress arises from the various physical, psychosocial and cognitive demands of the work. It is important for the employer and the supervisor to understand and reduce the workload factors. This can help prevent sickness absences and permanent disability.

SOLUTIONS



Identify and reduce the risk factors

that increase the physical workload. You can, for instance, modify the work and work arrangements and ensure good work ergonomics. Also ensure adequate work induction.

Strengthen the work resources

that support well-being at work and work ability. Resources may relate to, e.g. the work tasks, the organisation of work or interpersonal relations at work.

Develop effective working-time arrangements.

The development can be related to, for example, self-scheduling of working hours, work breaks, recovering from work, or common rules for time management. Also reinforce employees' opportunities to influence their working hours.

Anticipate the future of work.

In teams, have a joint discussion on work, work-related challenges, and future perspectives. Good management and smooth co-operation also help in adapting to changes.

Strengthen competence.

Make sure that employees' competence respond to future work needs. Invest also in the competence of managers and supervisors, including from the perspective of work ability and mental health.

Provide sufficient support for work ability.

Ensure effective practices for early support, sick leave monitoring, returning to work and occupational health collaboration. Build a work culture that tackles work ability challenges at a low threshold and early enough.

Of service workers and cashiers
who received disability pension

43%

received disability pension due
to a musculoskeletal disease

60%

of young people between 26 and
35 received disability pension
for mental health reasons

In the accommodation
and food service sector

59%

of disability pension recipients
were over 55 years old

Source: Application analytics, Varma's online service for corporate customers, 2019–2022

What do we know?

Work in the service sector is demanding in many ways. Various risk factors exist in the work environment, and the work can be physically demanding. Service sector work also involves several stressful working-hour characteristics. The psychosocial workload can be associated with, for example, challenging interactions in customer work, management challenges, working alone or the threat of violence at work. In addition, job insecurity and constant change can be stressful.

Many of the positive features of a job, such as good opportunities to influence the work and working hours, meaningful and important work, good supervisory work and a good work community, can protect an employee from the stress factors related to work.

Why is this important?

Workload factors can, if they persist, have many negative effects on employees' well-being at work and work ability. Musculoskeletal diseases are the most common reason for sick leave in the service sector. Mental health challenges have become increasingly prevalent, particularly among young employees. In the worst-case scenario, prolonged workload and an imbalance between the job's demands and resources can lead to permanent work disability.

What should be done?

It is important for workplaces to identify and prevent workload factors. The key is to come up with organisation-level solutions for managing the workload. Solutions can involve, for instance, the organisation of work, work modification, developing the working time, developing competence, strengthening a sense of community, or developing practices to support work ability.

A combination of various interventions to support
work ability produces more effective results.



KEY WORKLOAD FACTORS IN THE SERVICE INDUSTRY

- Awkward working postures, manual lifting and moving, standing for long periods
- Irregular working hours, evening and night shifts, short shift intervals
- Excessive amount of work, time pressure and tight deadlines
- Unclear goals, challenges in management and supervisory work
- Challenging interactions in customer work
- Challenges in interpersonal relations at work, e.g. lack of support from colleagues
- Constant changes and feelings of insecurity

AUTHOR AND ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

Auli Airila, Research Manager
auli.airila@varma.fi

HOW THE BUSINESS BRIEF WAS MADE:

The solutions are based on Varma's publication series 'Information about work ability', which examines, mostly based on Finnish research literature, the challenges and resources related to work, as well as work ability in the retail sector and in the accommodation and food service sector.

The publication is in Finnish, and available on our website
www.varma.fi/tutkimus

VARMA