

Elinolot / Työelämä

21.12.2007

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Accidents at work and work-related health problems

Labour Force Survey ad hoc module 2007

Interviewer instructions

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Background and objectives of the survey

Accidents at work and work-related health problems is an ad hoc module of the Labour Force Survey conducted in all Member States of the European Union. The topic of the ad hoc module of the survey changes every year and their purpose is to collect internationally comparable data on current and politically interesting issues. The survey topics are determined by the European Commission and the data content of the surveys is defined in a regulation, after a working group consisting of representatives of different countries has agreed on the information to be asked in the survey. The results of the survey are used both in Finland and in the EU to support decision-making concerning working life.

An ad hoc module on accidents at work and occupational diseases was conducted also in 1999. The topics covered in the 2007 survey are fairly similar, but some changes have been made. The objective is to collect data which are comparable with the data collected in 1999 and can be used to examine the development of the phenomenon.

The survey examines the frequency of accidents at work and work-related health problems. Specific points of interest are:

- Absences due to accidents at work and work-related health problems, and their duration.
- Differences between different employee groups and employer types in the frequency of accidents at work and work-related health problems.
- Various work-related risk factors which may endanger an employee's health of well-being.

The survey also includes a few questions on violence experienced at the workplace. These questions are based on domestic information needs and are realised in the same form as in the 1999 ad hoc module.

Basic information on the survey

Survey timing and target group

The data collection of the survey continues throughout the year 2007. The target group includes all employed persons belonging to rotation group 5 as well as those unemployed persons who have previously been employed. Target groups do, however, vary by section, and the majority of the questions are asked from employed persons and persons who have been employed during the past year.

Contact persons at Statistics Finland

Inquiries concerning the contents of the survey can be addressed to:
Ms Laura Hulkko, tel. +358 9 1734 2611, laura.hulkko@stat.fi
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The data content of the survey in brief

TT1–TT10: Occupational accidents during the past 12 months

These questions are asked from all employed persons and persons who have been employed during the past year. The questions are used to ascertain

whether the interviewee has experienced accidents at work during the past year. If the interviewee has experienced more than one accident at work, he/she is asked more specifically about where the latest accident took place and about the absence from work associated with it.

TT11–TT23: Work-related illnesses

These questions are asked from all employed persons and persons who have previously been employed. In terms of content, these questions are similar to the questions on accidents, but they concern also what kind of health problem was in question and how much it limited the interviewee's day-to-day activities.

TT24–TT32: Threats to well-being at the workplace

These questions are only asked from employed persons. The questions in this section examine the frequency of various risk factors related to the work environment at the interviewee's workplace. The questions are asked from employed persons and are divided into two themes: Questions TT24–TT26 relate to factors which adversely affect mental well-being and questions TT28–TT31 relate to factors which adversely affect physical health.

TT33–TT36: Violence at work

These questions are asked from employed persons and persons who have been employed during the past year. They examine whether the interviewee has experienced violence or a threat of violence at work or on the way to work. If such events have taken place, some specific further questions are asked.

General instructions for the interview

The majority of the **questions concern facts**, and if necessary the interviewee can be assisted by using the screen instructions and the interview instructions. The purpose of the questions can be clarified to the interviewees, but the final answer is selected by the interviewee on the basis of his/her personal opinion.

The questions TT24–TT32 concerning factors which adversely affect well-being at work are **questions of opinion**, in which additional instructions are not used.

The objective is to ask all questions. If a proxy respondent has to be used, it may be difficult to obtain an answer to some of the questions. In such cases the "Cannot say" code can be used, if necessary.

Unlike in the basic part of the Labour Force Survey, the making of detailed remarks on specific questions is allowed in the ad hoc module. The remarks are examined afterwards and can be useful when designing the next corresponding survey. Feedback on the survey and the questions can be given directly to Ms Laura Hulkko, especially if you find that there might be a general need for additional instructions to some questions.

Instructions by question

Occupational accidents during the past 12 months

Definition of an occupational accident:

An accident is a **sudden occurrence** resulting in some sort of injury. Health problems which have developed over a longer period of time are not included here, they are taken into account in the section on work-related illnesses. Sometimes it may be difficult to distinguish between a sudden accident or an illness which has developed over time. If, for example, a nurse accidentally pricks him/herself with a needle and develops an infection as a result, the situation is considered as an accident, as the illness originated from a sudden occurrence.

Only the accidents are taken into account which have occurred at the **workplace, during working hours or while working**. Accidents which occur during travel between the workplace and home or the canteen are not considered to be occupational accidents. In this sense the scope of the concept of occupational accident adopted in this survey differs from the often used concept of occupational accident which includes also accidents that occur during the journey between home and work.

TT1, TT2. Has the interviewee had occupational accidents during the past 12 months?

The purpose of the questions is to ascertain the frequency of accidents and to function as a filter for further questions on occupational accidents. The reference period consists of the 12 months preceding the day of the interview.

Accidents in traffic are taken into account if the work is performed in a means of transport (e.g. bus or taxi drivers) or if the person was on a work-related journey or a journey made during working hours when the accident occurred.

An **accident during a lunch or other break** is taken into account if it has occurred on the premises of the work place.

If the interviewee has had accidents but cannot specify their number, note down "Cannot say" in question TT2. Regardless of this, the interviewee is guided to the further questions concerning the latest accident.

TT3. Did the accident occur in traffic or at the workplace?

The purpose of the question is to specify what kind of accident has occurred. The distinction between accidents in traffic and other occupational accidents is necessary so that the results can be compared to the data on accidents obtained from administrative registers.

Code 1: Occupational accidents while in traffic are considered to include accidents which have occurred on **public roads** or public or private **parking areas**. The victim may have been on board the mode of transport (as driver or passenger) or a pedestrian. There can be two kinds of cases: the actual work of the accident victim may relate to the transport industry or traffic (e.g. bus or truck drivers) or the accident may have happened during a work-related journey such as on the way to a meeting outside the victim's own workplace.

Code 2: All other accidents than those occurring in traffic come under this code. Code 2 is used also if the accident has occurred **outside public roads** on some special work vehicle (e.g. forklifts, tractors, forestry vehicles) or has been caused by such a vehicle. However, if the victim was driving e.g. a

tractor on a public road at the time of the accident, code 1 is used. Accidents which have occurred on **private thoroughfares** such as factory areas come under code 2.

TT4, TT5. In which job did the accident occur?

The basic part of the Labour Force Survey provides information on the current main and secondary jobs of employed persons, the latest jobs of unemployed persons and the jobs all members of the target group had one year ago. With questions TT4 and TT5, data on accidents can be linked to the job the interviewee had when the accident occurred. This is important e.g. when examining in which occupation and at what kinds of workplaces accidents occur most often.

The screen will show background information on the jobs the interviewee has given information on. **Note down the first applicable alternative in numerical order.** For example, if in question TT4 the interviewee's current main job is the same as his/her job one year ago, note down code 1. Correspondingly, if in question TT5 the persons latest job is the same as his/her job one year ago, note down code 1.

If the accident did not occur in any of the jobs listed, note down code 4 in question TT4 and code 3 in question TT5. These codes are also used when e.g. the accident occurred in a secondary job the interviewee had beside his/her latest main job or the main job he/she had one year ago.

TT6–TT10. Absences due to accidents

These questions are designed to elicit two kinds of information:

1. The number of days absent, if the interviewee has returned to work after the accident or recovered his/her working ability.
2. An estimate of the possibility of returning to work, if the interviewee has not yet returned to work.

All **whole days** when the interviewee was unable to work due to an accident, **weekends and mid-week holidays included**, are considered as days absent from work. If return to work after the accident has been gradual, e.g. starting with part-time work, only those days of absence from work are considered, during which the interviewee was not working at all.

If the interviewee has for some other reason not returned to work straight after having recovered from the accident, the absence is considered to have continued until the time when the interviewee's state of health would have permitted him/her to return to work.

Work-related illnesses

Questions concerning work-related illnesses are asked from all employed persons and also all those unemployed persons who have previously been employed. The questions are, therefore, asked also from e.g. pensioners whose latest employment may have ended already years ago. A work-related illness may, however, have caused long-term symptoms or permanent harm, so the interviewee may have suffered also during the past year from the effects of a work-related illness which originated a long time ago.

Definition of a work-related illness:

Work-related illnesses and symptoms have in this context been defined very broadly. An illness or symptom is considered to be work-related if, **in the interviewee's opinion**, either the current or a former **job has caused it or made the symptoms worse**. Therefore, the illness does not need to be officially diagnosed or recognised as work-related. Milder symptoms which have not required the interviewee to be absent from work are also taken into account.

In the case of **infectious diseases** (e.g. common cold) it may be difficult to define whether the contagion took place at the workplace or somewhere else. If the interviewee wonders whether such a disease can be considered to be work-related, he/she can be asked if a specific risk of infectious diseases is inherent to his/her job when compared with other jobs or day-to-day life. On these grounds e.g. a kindergarten teacher's falling ill during the worst cold season when most of the children are ill could be considered work-related.

TT11, TT12. Has the interviewee had work-related illnesses or symptoms during the past 12 months?

All physical and mental illnesses and symptoms are taken into account, if the interviewee considers his/her work to have caused them or to have worsened the symptoms. No time limit has been set on the occurrence of the illness; it may have originated a long time in the past as long as the interviewee has experienced symptoms during the last 12 months. If a work-related illness which has appeared earlier has not caused symptoms over the past year, it is not taken into account.

The point of interest in question TT12 is the number of different health problems, not how many times they have occurred. If the interviewee has experienced **symptoms of the same illness more than once** during the year (e.g. occasional symptoms of back pain, recurrent bronchitis), they are considered as one illness. Correspondingly, if **one illness has caused various different symptoms**, note down code 1.

TT13. What kind of an illness or symptom?

If the interviewee has some work-related illness, this question seeks further information on it. If the interviewee has **more than one illness or symptom**, ask him/her to select the most serious one. Defining which illness is the most serious is the interviewee's task, but it can generally be thought that the most serious illness is the one which causes the most harm or limits the interviewee's functioning ability the most.

In some cases the type of illness has been clarified already with earlier questions so the code to be selected here may seem self-evident. In such cases you can note down the code without reading out the alternatives. It is, however, advisable to confirm with the interviewee that the code you note down is correct.

The classification of illnesses is here mostly based on the anatomical location of the symptoms. For example, symptoms in the musculoskeletal system come under codes 01–03, depending on the location of the problem in the upper body, in the lower body or in the back. Cancer does not have a code of its own, but comes under the code of the relevant anatomical location (e.g. lung cancer comes under code 04 and skin cancer under code 05). If the cancer cannot be coded under any of these alternatives (e.g. cancers affecting the internal organs), use code 11: Other illness or symptom.

TT14. Does a work-related illness or symptom limit daily functioning?

Any factors limiting daily functioning both at work and outside work are taken into account. Such limitations may be e.g. mobility limitations or repeated sick leaves. The interviewee decides whether the illness limits his/her functioning and to what degree.

TT15–TT21. Absences from work due to work-related illness

The objective is to find out **how many calendar days the person has been unable to work during the past year** because of the work-related illness in

question (the most serious one). Weekends and mid-week holidays during the sick leave period are also counted towards the duration of the sick leave. If the interviewee has had **several** sick leave periods **for the same reason** during the past year their duration is counted together. Only the absences during the past 12 months are taken into account, even if the period of absence has begun already earlier.

Only **full days of absence** are taken into account. For example, if the interviewee has started to work again part-time after a long period of absence, the duration of absence is counted on the basis of the time he/she was completely absent from work.

The interviewee may report the duration of especially mid-length absences as days, weeks or months. The following rules of thumb can be used in the coding:

One week = 7 days → code 3

Two weeks = 14 days → code 4

One month = four weeks = 30 days → code 5.

If the interviewee is **currently absent from work** due to the work-related illness he/she has mentioned, ask a further question on if he/she thinks he/she will be able to return to work later. If the answer is yes, a further question on the duration of the absence is asked. The duration of the absence is then calculated on the basis of how long the interviewee has **been absent before the time of the interview** due to a work-related illness.

TT22, TT23. What work caused the illness or worsened the symptoms?

The basic part of the Labour Force Survey gives information on the current main and secondary job of employed employer persons, on the latest job of unemployed persons and the jobs all respondents had one year ago. With questions TT22 (employed persons) and TT23 (unemployed persons) information on occupational illness can be linked to the job that caused it. These questions are not asked from the non-employed, whose latest employment relationship ended over eight years ago.

The screen will show background information on the jobs the interviewee has given information on. **Select the first appropriate one in numerical order.** For example, if in question TT22 the interviewee's current main job is the same as his/her job one year ago, note down code 1. Correspondingly, if in question TT23 the person's latest job is the same as his/her job one year ago, note down code 1.

If the illness was caused by something other than one of the jobs mentioned, select code 4 in question TT22 and code 3 in question TT23. These codes are also used when e.g. the accident occurred in a secondary job the interviewee had beside his/her latest main job or the main job he/she had one year ago.

Threats to well-being at the workplace (TT24–TT32)

The target group of these questions consists of employed persons. The objective is to examine the interviewee's opinion on whether certain factors threatening psychological or physical well-being are present in his/her job. The questions concern **opinions** and are indicated with the letter M. The answer should be the interviewee's own subjective opinion. If the interviewee has several jobs, **the questions refer to the main job.**

In questions TT25 and TT31 the expression "greater than usual risk" is used. Here the interviewee decides whether the risk of violence or accidents is greater in his/her job than in other jobs or everyday life.

The interviewee should also assess if time pressure or work pressure affect his/her mental well-being. People cope differently with pressure, and the amount of time pressure cannot be measured with anything but by asking about the person's own experience.

If the interviewee's job involves more than one risk factor threatening his/her mental or physical well-being, he/she is asked for an assessment of which of them is the biggest threat to well-being (questions TT27 and TT32). It is important to get an answer to this question, because in the final data file to be delivered to the EU the data are combined into one variable concerning the main factor threatening mental and physical well-being. If the answer to questions TT27 of TT32 is "Cannot say", the data must be coded as unknown and data on risk factors will remain entirely hidden. **Avoid the "Cannot say" alternative in questions TT27 and TT32**, try to get the interviewee to select one of the risk factors he/she has mentioned.

Violence at work (TT33–TT36)

The objective of this section of the survey is to examine separately experienced violence at work even if some of the cases may have been discussed earlier in connection with the questions on accidents at work. The interviewees may find this repetitive, but it is important that the cases of violence are noted down also in this section. The target group of these questions consists of employed persons and persons who have been employed during the past year.

The section on violence at work does not belong to the data content required by the EU. It is included to meet national data needs. The section's questions were asked in the same form also in to 1999 ad hoc module.

Key definitions

Violence refers to any incident in which physical or sexual violence was exercised, attempted, or threatened with.

Unlike in the questions on accidents at work and occupational illnesses, here also **violence which has taken place on the way to work** is included. **On the way to work** refers to the journey between the home and the workplace or some other regular journey (e.g. to a place where lunch is eaten regularly).

In question TT36 the answer is always coded into classes 1–3 if the victim knew the person, or one of more persons, who committed the violent act. Class 1 includes also customers of service professionals and e.g. a care professional's patients, a teacher's students and persons subject to police measures even if the victim did not know them previously.

Addition to the interviewer instructions

At the beginning of February some small revisions were made to the questionnaire (documented on the questionnaire). At the same time the interviewers were sent the following additional instructions via e-mail:

The instructions of the Labour Force Survey's Accidents at work and work-related health problems ad hoc module need supplementary information as regards the questions on absence from work (especially TT8 but also TT19). These questions refer specifically to the period during which the person has been unable to work because of an occupational accident or work-related illness. If the person has not returned to work directly after recovering due to some other reason, these additional days are not counted towards the duration of the absence.

Example: A person has a part-time job and works only on Mondays and Tuesdays. He/she has an occupational accident on Monday and is absent from work on Tuesday because of the accident. He/she is already recovered on Wednesday, but the following shift is only on the following Monday. The duration of the absence in question TT8 is noted down as alternative 03. 1–3 full days.

As from the beginning of February the wording of questions TT8 and TT19 has been changed slightly and a screen instruction has been added to avoid misunderstandings on this point.

In addition a small change has been made in the flow of the questionnaire form after question TT6. Now all employed persons will be guided to question TT7, i.e. they will be asked if they have returned to work after the accident. The earlier flow, which guided the interviewees who were working during the survey week directly to the question on the number of days of absence, did not take into account the cases in which the accident had occurred in the middle of the survey week.