Burn out in the workplace - an overview

Prof. Asoc. Dr. Lumturi MERKURI

Corresponding author
E-mail: lumturi.merkuri@uet.edu.al
European University of Tirana,
Faculty of Medical Technical Science, Tirana, Albania

Eljo PAJA

European University of Tirana,
Faculty of Medical Technical Science, Tirana, Albania

Abstract

Introduction: Burnout in the workplace is a complex reaction to continuous stress, that negatively affects employer 's mental and physical health and organizational productivity. This phenomenon is related to various personal and environmental factors, such as workplace support and individual characteristics.

Aim: To provide an overview on several aspects of the burnout syndrome in five key sectors: healthcare, education, law enforcement, social work and finance.

Methodology: A literature search was carried out to identify and analyses recently published articles related this phenomenon. This included studies from ScienceDirect, BMJ Open, PubMed, Google Scholar, Scopus, Web of Science, etc., using keywords such as "workplace burnout", "stress at work", "interventions for well-being", and "mental health at work".

Results: The findings of this review indicate that various factors, such as high workload and emotional demands, conflicts, lack of support, significantly increase the risk for burnout. Interventions focusing on stress management and social support

showed significant improvements in employee well-being. WHO has developed competency standards for health workers to support people's ability to self-care.

Conclusions: *Personalized interventions, combined with policies that promote a supportive work environment, are essential for reducing burnout and improving overall employer well-being. These findings suggest the need for strategic interventions to address the emotional and psychological needs of employers and development policies and practices that will increase job satisfaction and reduce its negative impact.*

Keywords: *workplace burnout, work support, wellness interventions, stress management*

Introduction

Burnout is a prevalent syndrome in contemporary workplaces, with significant consequences for individuals' mental health, physical well-being, and professional performance (1). The term burnout first was described in 1974 by Herbert Freudenberg, as the emotional and psychological stress experienced by workers. Later, Maslach and Jackson (1981) divided burnout by three qualitative dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment (2,3). Since then, burnout has been conceptualized as workplace stress in any professional context, especially in professions that require high emotional commitment and constant demands to maintain work quality (4). Beyond its individual impact, burnout also affects organizations, leading to reduced productivity, increased absenteeism, and decreased job satisfaction (5).

Numerous professional fields affected by burnout. In the healthcare sector, high levels of stress from daily tasks and the pressure for quick, accurate decisions make this sector one of the most at risk (6,7). Consequently, burnout has become a global challenge for healthcare systems, affecting both the quality of patient care and employee well-being (8).

In the education sector, teachers face high academic demands and classroom management challenges, which contribute to emotional exhaustion and, in many cases, a desire to leave the profession (5,7). Burnout among teachers also affects students, who may benefit less from teaching when their teachers are overburdened (7,9). Insufficient organizational support and a lack of resources for task completion are key factors in the experience of burnout in education (5).

Law enforcement personnel are also affected by burnout due to ongoing pressures and exposure to traumatic events, which influence emotional exhaustion and depersonalization (10,11). Police officers face administrative constraints and unexpected workloads that increase stress and impact their performance and service quality for citizens (4,12).

Social workers face high emotional demands due to the sensitive nature of their work, often dealing with individuals in difficult social and emotional situations. This exposure contributes to emotional exhaustion and reduced motivation. Burnout in this sector is closely linked to a lack of support and resources, necessitating stronger support for managing emotional burdens (6,13).

The banking sector is also affected by burnout due to the industry's stressful nature and surrounding economic uncertainty. Pressure to meet financial targets during times of crisis increases stress and emotional exhaustion among bank employees (14,15). Interpersonal interactions and organizational culture also influence burnout levels (16).

Burnout presents a widespread challenge across multiple sectors and professions, impacting individuals' well-being and organizational productivity. Studying the contributing factors and identifying prevention methods is essential for creating a sustainable and healthy work environment (1,10).

Methodology

An extensive literature review was carried out, including peer-reviewed articles, scholarly publications, available of WHO strategy documents and other significant documents on workplace burnout. The initial search included a wide range of keywords such as "burnout," "work-related stress," "stress management," and "mental health in the workplace". Recently published scientific articles from prominent platforms such as PubMed, Google Scholar, Frontiers, MDPI, BMJ Mental Health, were used for data synthesis and to develop a reference database for systematic selection and accurate citation. This methodology provides a solid foundation for exploring burnout in the five selected sectors. To enhance accuracy and relevance, only articles published within the last ten years were included.

Results

This overview found that, although burnout is a widespread issue that significantly affects all professional fields, it is highly prevalent among HCPs, education sector staff, law enforcement and police officers and social workers due to the intense and continuous nature of contact with individuals receiving care.

According to the available data, healthcare workers seem to be at particular risk for burnout with significant negative personal but also important professional consequences. For healthcare professionals, international variations in burnout levels reflect differences in cultural expectations and organizational structures. In the U.S., healthcare workers face high burnout rates due to intense performance

demands, with more than 75% reporting serious emotional exhaustion caused by heavy workloads and challenges within the insurance system (2,17). In Japan, societal pressures to appear resilient, combined with high-stress work environments, contribute to comparable burnout rates. In Germany, however, the presence of institutional support has helped reduce burnout to about 55%, underscoring the positive impact of strong support systems for employees (18,19).

Similarly, the education sector experiences noticeable differences across countries. In the UK, teachers feel overwhelmed by rigorous standards and continuous quality demands, with around 65% reporting burnout symptoms due to a lack of adequate support . In contrast, Canadian policies are more supportive, which has led to a lower burnout rate of about 48%, showing the value of organized support for teacher well-being (5,7). In France, where resources are more constrained, nearly 58% of teachers report burnout symptoms, suggesting room for policy enhancements to aid educators (7).

Law enforcement officers also experience high burnout, largely due to frequent exposure to stressful situations. Over 60% of U.S. police officers report symptoms of burnout, including emotional exhaustion and detachment, stemming from daily stress and limited support (20,21). In Germany, however, better stress management programs and institutional support reduce burnout prevalence about 45%, emphasizing how support structures can mitigate job-related stress (10,22).

Social work, with its intense emotional demands, similarly shows high burnout levels across countries. In the U.S., over 65% of social workers report emotional exhaustion due to challenging client interactions (6,20). Meanwhile, in Canada, stress management training has reduced burnout in social services to around 50% (6). In France, where institutional support is less robust, over 60% of social workers experience burnout symptoms, highlighting the need for resources to manage their high-stress roles (18).

Our overview also found that in the banking sector, pressures to meet performance targets and economic instability heavily contribute to burnout. In the US, around 58% of banking employees report burnout due to the demand for high financial performance (15). In Japan, cultural and professional expectations lead to burnout symptoms in over 60% of bank employees (14). Germany's stronger institutional support, however, has reduced this rate to approximately 50%, showing the importance of workplace support in reducing stress and emotional exhaustion (16).

Although the main causes of burnout are almost the same, the factors leading to burnout vary across Europe in terms of their impact on employees' lives. A series of coping strategies have been identified from both the employer and individual perspectives (18,23).

We also found that WHO declared burnout as a serious health issue and incorporated in the International Classification of Diseases 11th revision/ ICD-11. According to ICD-11, burn out is defined "a syndrome conceived as a result of chronic stress in the workplace that has not been successfully managed" (19).

Conclusions

Burnout is a growing issue that affects a wide range of professions, negatively impacting both individual well-being and organizational productivity. It is especially prevalent in high-stress fields such as healthcare, education, law enforcement, social work, and banking, where emotional exhaustion, detachment, and performance pressures are common.

The prevalence of burnout is influenced by workplace policies, structures, and cultural norms, with supportive environments helping to reduce its occurrence. Countries and organizations with strong employee well-being initiatives tend to have lower burnout rates.

To mitigate burnout, experts recommend creating supportive work environments through stress management programs, training for coping with stress, and fostering employee well-being.

Further research is needed to better understand burnout's causes and identify effective interventions for both individuals and organizations.

References

1. Edú-Valsania, S., et al. (2022). The Impact of Burnout on the Quality of Life of Workers: A Systematic Review. International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 19(3), 1780. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19031780
2. Maslach C., Jackson S. E. (1981). The measurement of experienced burnout. J. Organ. Behav. 2:99–113. 10.1002/job.4030020205 [DOI] [Google Scholar]
3. Lee, R. T., & Ashforth, B. E. (2019). Sustained Burnout in the Workplace: A Novel Perspective on the Experience of Burnout. Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, 156, 72-87. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.obhdp.2019.03.007
4. Papazoglou, K., et al. (2022). The Impact of Occupational Stress on Police Officers. Police Journal: Theory, Practice, and Principles, 95(1), 7-25. https://doi.org/10.1177/0032258X211005346
5. Kuyken, W., et al. (2022). Teachers' occupational health and well-being: The impact of workload. Journal of Education and Work, 35(3), 234-251. https://doi.org/10.1080/13639080.2022.2032484
6. Lizano, E. L. (2019). Examining social workers' burnout. Human Service Organizations: Management, Leadership & Governance, 43(4), 319-334. https://doi.org/10.1080/23303131.2019.1627714

7. Harmsen, R., et al. (2019). Teacher burnout and motivation in times of change. Teaching and Teacher Education, 77, 101-115. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2018.09.017

8. De Hert S. (2020). Burnout in Healthcare Workers: Prevalence, Impact and Preventative Strategies. *Local and regional anesthesia*, *13*, 171–183. https://doi.org/10.2147/LRA.S240564

9. Travers, C. J. (2017). Teacher stress and burnout: A review of the literature. Educational Psychology, 28(1), 47-62. https://doi.org/10.1080/01443410701491837

10. Maslach, C., & Leiter, M. P. (2016). Burnout: A Guide to Identifying Burnout and Pathways to Recovery. Harvard Business Review Press.

11. Bakker, A. B., & Demerouti, E. (2017). Job Demands-Resources Theory: Taking Stock and Looking Forward. Journal of Occupational Health Psychology, 22(3), 273-285. https://doi.org/10.1037/ocp0000056

12. Violanti, J. M., & Aron, F. (2018). Police stress and burnout: Examining the link between work stressors and depression. Journal of Police and Criminal Psychology, 33(2), 122-135. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11896-018-9261-4

13. Burr, H., Pohrt, A., & Angerer, P. (2020). Burnout in social work: An examination of causes, consequences, and interventions. Social Work Journal, 61(3), 229-243. https://doi.org/10.1093/sw/swaa010

14. Wheater, S., & Barry, M. (2020). Managing burnout in financial services. Journal of Financial Services Research, 58(2), 181-195. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10693-019-00302-8

15. Gupta, A., & Kumar, P. (2023). The Role of Workplace Relationships in Reducing Bank Employee Burnout. Business and Society Review, 128(1), 65-90. https://doi.org/10.1111/basr.12290

16. Gilmartin, H. M., & McGowan, P. J. (2021). Coping Strategies and Burnout: A Longitudinal Study of Emergency Services Personnel. Journal of Occupational Health Psychology, 26(1), 57-68. https://doi.org/10.1037/ocp0000180

17. Shanafelt, T. D., West, C. P., & Sinsky, C. (2019). Changes in burnout and satisfaction with work-life balance in physicians and the general US working population between 2011 and 2017. Mayo Clinic Proceedings, 94(9), 1681-1694. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.mayocp.2018.10.023

18. Euro found (2018), Burnout in the workplace: A review of data and policy responses in the EU, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg. https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/en/publications/2018/burnout-workplace-review-data-and-policy-responses-eu

19. WHO (2019). *Burn-out an "occupational phenomenon": International Classification of Diseases.* https://www.who.int/news/item/28-05-2019-burn-out-an-occupational-phenomenon-international-classification-of-diseases. Accessed 2 October 2024

20. Wang, Y., et al. (2021). The Relationship Between Work Stress and Burnout Among Chinese Social Workers: The Mediating Role of Social Support. Social Work, 66(1), 1-10. https://doi.org/10.1093/sw/swaa014

21. Hu, Y., et al. (2020). The Mediating Role of Job Crafting in the Relationship Between Psychological Capital and Burnout Among Nurses. Journal of Advanced Nursing, 76(6), 1332-1343. https://doi.org/10.1111/jan.14208

22. Leiter, M. P., & Maslach, C. (2016). Burnout and Engagement: A New Approach to the Analysis of Burnout and Engagement. In Work Engagement: A Handbook of Essential Theory and Research (pp. 25-39). Psychology Press.

23. Sipos, D., Goyal, R., & Zapata, T. (2024). Addressing burnout in the healthcare workforce: current realities and mitigation strategies. *The Lancet regional health. Europe*, *42*, 100961. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lanepe.2024.100961