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employee burnout



Burnout Britain

Raising the Alarm for Employers

A Hudson Report
June 2005

Burnout Britain?

Raising the Alarm for Employees.

Executive Summary

Burnout Britain examines awareness and opinion among both UK employers and employees of employee 'burnout'¹. It forms part of an annual programme of qualitative and quantitative research conducted by global recruitment and HR consultancy, Hudson, looking at issues and trends affecting the modern workplace. The increase in severe workplace stress, and the impact of worker fatigue on wider business performance and talent retention, has become an increasing cause for concern amongst both employers and employees.

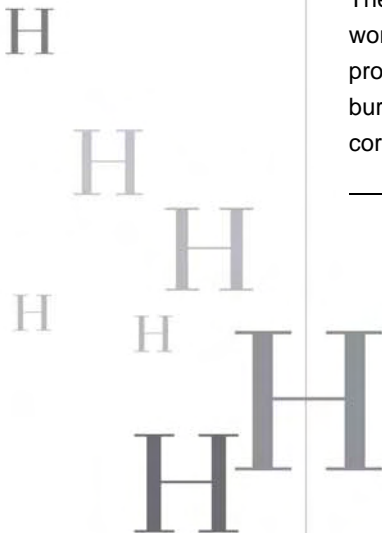
The report revealed a widespread acceptance among employers and employees that the phenomenon of burnout is real and present in the current UK working environment. Moreover, not only is it clear that burnout is prevalent among UK workers, the problem is also getting worse, with both employers and employees recognising an increase in extreme workplace stress and fatigue in recent years.

In terms of the causes of this rise, both employers and employees blamed a more competitive and fast-paced business environment. 'The increased pace of business life' and 'an increased competitive environment' were cited as the key reasons behind the increase, in addition to a 'decrease in the number of employees to do the same amount of work'.

The increase in burnout has made a tangible impact on working life, for both employers and workers. For the former, the implications of burnout are more than simply a reduction in productivity and increasing absenteeism. The research reveals employers increasingly feel burnout is affecting their bottom line by contributing to a loss of talent and damaging corporate reputation and ultimately profitability.

Burnout differs from stress in that it causes people who have previously been highly committed to their work to become disillusioned, losing all interest and motivation. Sufferers face physical, emotional and mental exhaustion, a sense of reduced personal achievement and a lack of concern for customers and clients, experienced by almost one in six (15%) employees surveyed by Hudson. Definition of burnout sourced from Hudson experts and Mind Tools. For more information, go to www.mindtools.com.

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And more personally, employers themselves are also feeling the affects directly with more than a third stating burnout had happened to one or more colleagues.

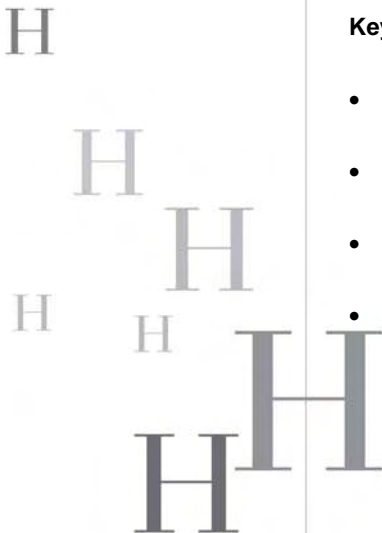
For an employee, the implications of burnout can be far-reaching. Its impact extends to their own health, sense of well-being and overall attitude to their jobs and career. Although the research revealed the numbers of employees currently experiencing full burnout are low, a significant proportion of workers are experiencing typical symptoms or displaying worrying levels of workplace apathy and disinterest, including loss of sleep, emotional exhaustion and high stress levels.

Yet, despite being unanimous in their acknowledgement that burnout exists and the problem is worsening, employers still tend to only deal with the issue on a largely reactive basis with many employers simply not having any formal process in place for helping an employee who had suffered from burnout; still less actively encourage their staff to work fewer hours.

Many workers simply do not believe their employer had taken measures to address issues of increased workload and pressure. For that reason, the research revealed an apparent underlying discrepancy between what employers *claim* to be doing and what they are actually *seen* to be doing by employees; one which could prove costly for employers and workers alike.

Key findings

- More than half (52%) of Britain's **employees** claim to have experienced one or more symptoms of over-work or burnout in the last six months
- One in two **employees** (49%) and **employers** (46%) thought the situation had worsened in the last five years
- 4% of **employees** believed they were burned out or near to burnout. A further 8% said they rarely enjoyed their work and were stressed most of the time.
- **Employees** (76%) and **employers** (78%) were most likely to believe that the increased pace of business life was a cause of burnout.



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Key findings Contd.

- 52% of **employees** and 35% of **employers** believe that burnout had happened to one or more colleagues.
- One in seven (14%) of the HR managers interviewed have lost one or more members of staff due to burnout
- Over a third of **employers** (36%) have witnessed a decline in productivity and the vast majority (79%) report an increase in the number of sick days being taken
- 59% of **employers** have no formal process in place for helping an employee who is suffering from burnout (falling to just 30% amongst smaller **employers**)
- More than a third (35%) of **employees** are concerned that their **employers** have made no attempts to address increased workloads
- One third of **employees** (31%) have experienced physical or emotional exhaustion in the last six months and 26% suffered loss of sleep or illness due to worrying about work.

What is clear from the report: prevention is better than cure. Employers need to consider new measures and protocol for identifying burnout *before* it happens, and offer employees new means of managing stress and fatigue. The research showed that many are already taking steps to provide confidential advice and web-based support, but too few workers feel their employers are taking an active interest in their welfare.

What should employers do to prevent burnout?

- Build better support networks for employees
- Increase clarity around role and delivery expectations, and revisit job design for roles where burnout is common
- Help employees build additional skills to enable them to perform their job more efficiently
- Give clearer out-of-hours expectations
- Encourage employees to work fewer hours
- Recruit more employees to deal with permanent and/or temporary workload increases
- Don't just deal with situations as they arise.

